University of Alberta

Identity, Difference, and Solidarity: The Challenge and Promise of Working in a Muslim Coalition

by

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Abstract

Current theorizing about coalitions suggests that their capacity to negotiate multiple and contested identity differences will be important for their survival and efficacy. This qualitative study explored how a Muslim coalition is thinking about and performing identity in the aftermath of September 11th and under the shadow of Islamophobia. Three important dimensions of coalition work emerged from the study. The first is the presence of an intention to engender unity without succumbing to essentialism. The second dimension is the development of multiple strategies for negotiating difference which, in this case include compromise/consensus, bracketing, and strong leadership all of which elicited a range of emotional responses including ambivalence. This relates to the third dimension which is the impact of ambivalence on identity porosity. It appears that ambivalence may engender the liminal and the hybrid which serve as countervailing presences to essentialism and the forms of differentiation it entails.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore how identity differences are understood and expressed within a coalition of Muslims who are working to address the negative effects of racialization. This identifiable minority group is currently the subject of intense scrutiny by the Canadian public and its media. However, Muslim identity is also the subject of reflection, debate, and dialogue within the Muslim community, although it is a conversation that is often obscured by the perception that Muslims are relatively homogeneous and unreflexive. This study then is an attempt to surface these internal dialogues and the complex and contested identities of Muslims, particularly in group environments by asking "What are the challenges of articulating multiple, shifting, and sometimes contested identities in a Muslim coalition?"

I conducted the research within a Muslim coalition that was formed in the wake of September 11, 2001. The stated purpose of this coalition is to advocate, educate, and liaise within and outside of the Muslim community to enhance Muslim participation in Canadian society and to increase awareness of their varied understandings and expressions of Islam. A significant portion of the Coalition's work focuses on dispelling racialized stereotypes, including the notion that the Muslim community is homogeneous and monolithic. Although the events that spurred its formation may be unique, like many coalitions, it faces the all-too-common challenges of working across the sometimes competing interests and complicating differences that exist within a coalition.

Origins of the Study

Community-based social justice work is hard work. By virtue of its being community based, it is often without an existing institutional framework and powered by grassroots energy. It is poorly funded, when it is funded at all. It requires selfless service and dogged determination to see through the organization and operation of, for example, an antiracist coalition. Social justice work also requires focus; to lose sight of the goal, to squander energy on unimportant activities can mean the death of a group. Burnout is high.

Over the past 30 years I have spent a great deal of time working on antiracism projects with members of my own (Muslim/Arab) and other 'visible-minority' groups. During that time I have become increasingly aware of an often tacit assumption that a shared experience of oppression on the basis of, say, skin colour is sufficient to ensure equity and equal voice within antiracist groups. Yet my experience informs me that this is not always the case. I have observed that sometimes our presumptions and assumptions about how others in the group experience oppression and exclusion not only are incorrect, but also serve to silence people. For example, my experience of racialization as an Arab/Muslim woman who does not wear *hijab* (head covering worn by some Muslim women) might be very different from that of an Arab/Muslim woman who wears *hijab*. We cannot presume each other's experiences or suffering, yet I believe that sometimes in our grassroots antiracism groups, what is missing are our own nuanced analyses and understandings of our various oppressions and our experiences of them.

Because I care about these spaces and the people working in them, it is my hope and most certainly my intention that this study will be helpful in determining how to

initiate and sustain ongoing and respectful dialogue about these issues. I believe that it is important to engage in internal conversations so that they might inform our work.

In the very particular case of Muslim coalitions, the issue of how identities are understood and expressed is fraught with complexities. On the one hand, I see many within the community struggling to respond to destructive stereotypes that often portray Muslims as a mindless monolith; whereas, on the other hand, I see Muslims as self-aware individuals struggling to create coherent lives in complex and sometimes unwelcoming societies. Although Muslims are actively dealing with issues of identities and belonging in the broader Canadian society, I believe that it is equally important that we, as Muslims, engage in individual and collective reflexive practice about how we conceptualize identity within our activist spaces.

Purpose

This study explores how members of a Muslim antiracism coalition understand and express both their collective and individual identities while negotiating multiple identity differences such as religious practices, gender, class, ethnicity, language, and length of citizenship. The purpose of the study was to determine to what degree, in what manner, and to what effect identity differences are surfaced and articulated within a racialized coalition.

Problem

Working in coalitions necessitates engaging with multiple differences (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Reagon, 2000). In a racialized coalition that is working for the first time across significant difference and against pressing social issues, there appears to be reluctance to focus too much attention on intragroup differences and

complex identity issues. Yet to downplay differences such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ideology, age, and political experience, according to Bystydzienski and Schacht, is to deny how these identities influence our "interpretations of events and strategies" (p. 7). The problem that the study addresses is how coalitions facilitate or repress the articulation of multiple identities in a Muslim coalition.

Research Questions

I designed the research questions to surface the degree to which thinking about identity and difference is essentialist or non-essentialist and how that thinking is reflected in coalition policies and practices. The study has three guiding questions:

1. How do Muslims in a coalition understand their identities?
2. How do they understand the identities of other coalition members as well as members of the Muslim community in Canada?
3. Which identities become identified as difference?
    - How are identities determined to be valuable, dangerous, or benign?
    - How is difference performed? That is, how is it talked about and acted upon among the organizations membership? With the broader Muslim communities? With Canadian society at large?
    - How does a coalition's approach to identity differences hinder or facilitate group participation?

Terminology

The following terms and concepts are used in particular ways in this study. A full discussion of all of them can be found in other parts of the thesis. Coalition, racialization, and identity are all discussed in further detail in chapter 2. The background section of this

chapter provides more detail about Muslims in Edmonton. Chapter 2 contains supplementary detail on the racialization and stereotyping of Muslims and Islam.

Coalition is a term used in this study to denote a group of either individuals or organizations, or both. It presumes that these individuals and organizations may be more or less different from one another. A coalition entails the negotiation of differences so that collective action can take place (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). A coalition in this study can also be understood to be a group of people who will "coalesce around those aspects of their worldviews that come to be recognized as shared and mutually important" (p. 8)

Racialization is used here to mean a "representational practice . . . used to mark racial difference" (Hall, 1997, p. 239). Racialization implies the fixing of an identity that resists analysis; therefore, it cannot change and always implies particular characteristics.

Identity is a contested concept and is reviewed in more detail in the next chapter. However, in brief, in this study construes identity as what Hall (1996) described as identification, meaning "some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group or with an ideal" (p. 2). This usage of identity allows for both "solidarity" and "allegiance" (p. 2), which are important to understand how Muslims work in coalitions. However, it is also important to remember that identity is never used to denote a closure; it is, according to Hall, "always in process" (p. 2) and "entails discursive work" (p. 3).

Islam is the name of a religion. It is one of the three Abrahamic religions and shares the God of Abraham with Christianity and Judaism. It is monotheistic. Islam considers the scriptures of both Christianity and Judaism as holy; however, the Quran is the Holy

Scripture revealed by God to the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him/PBUH). The central tenet of the faith is the unity of the Divine and the prophethood of Mohammed (PBUH). The profession of this tenet is referred to as the *Shahada*, or profession of faith. There are two major branches of Islam, *Sunnah* and *Shi'a*. Shi'a has several sub sects, including the Ithna'Ashariya, Ismaili, and Zaydiya. However, a number of other people might consider themselves Muslims who do not fall within these rubrics. The Ahmadiyya and the Druze are two such groups.

Muslim is the name used by those who identify with Islam or with other Muslims. In the context of this study it does not imply any particular type or degree of religiosity and may be used by those who identify with other Muslims, but who may or may not have any particular religious attachment to Islam. Those who follow a strict interpretation of the texts and the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) or Hadith are referred to in this thesis as *orthodox* Muslims, those whose identification allows the individual some interpretive leeway are referred to as *moderate* Muslims, and those whose identification is with the political issues associated with being part of the community are referred to as *secular* Muslims. This is not related to any official lexicon but provides a useful way to navigate the multiple ways in which the identity of Muslim is understood and expressed.

Orientalism refers to the discursive production of those who are described as being from the Orient and arises out of the many fields of study whose focus is that part of the world sometimes described as the *Orient* (Said 1979) or people of the Middle and Far East. It is important to note that Muslims and Arabs are considered, by Orientalists to be peoples of the Orient. In this study the representative legacy of Orientalism is linked to the contemporary production of Islamophobic discourse. One of the most important aspects

of Orientalist discourse is that it "…puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (ibid. p. 7).

Method

Complete details of methodology and how I conducted the research are provided in chapter 3. Briefly, the study took place in a Muslim coalition whose objectives are to facilitate the full participation of Muslims in Canadian society and to educate both Muslims and non-Muslims about the diversity of Muslims and their practices in Canada. I interviewed 10 members of the coalition in private, in-depth conversations. I selected the participants to ensure diversity and a degree of representativeness of the various groups participating in the coalition. Semi structured interviews allowed the interviewees to freely reflect upon or challenge my questions. Most interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours; however, on two occasions, with full consent and encouragement of the interviewees, the interview lasted over 2 hours.

I also observed certain activities of the coalition and selected those collective events that appeared to be most relevant to my research. Over the period of one year I observed five meetings and one special event. I collected and analyzed key documents, including terms of reference and bylaws, and focused on those that referred, either directly or indirectly, to issues of identity, group work, and membership.

Context

Muslim communities in Edmonton do not have a significant history of working across sectoral lines in coalitions. The coalition under study is only the second coalition in Canada, as far as I or the members of the Coalition are aware, in which Sunni, Shi'a and Ismaili Muslims are working together in a formalized coalitional context. The other

coalition is a women's group which makes the Coalition unique in that it is a coalition comprised of Muslim women and men from three Muslim sects. Although Muslims' racialized identity is often portrayed as homogeneous Muslim communities reflect a dazzling heterogeneity. To a large extent this heterogeneity is due to issues of postcolonial displacement, migration and their resultant hybridities.

In contrast to this extant heterogeneity is the Islamic construct *Ummah*. The concept of *Ummah* can roughly be equated to a sister/brotherhood of Muslims worldwide. This worldwide community of Muslims has a problematic history (Malik, 2004). What began during the very early days of Islam as a multifaith coalition for the defence of Mohammed and his followers eventually fractured over a disagreement about succession that resulted in the contemporary sectoral fissures in Islam (Malik, 2004). The contemporary yearning for Ummah expressed by some Muslims is reminiscent of Rushdie's (1991) concept of homeland as an imaginary ideal. Homeland or nation is a place, according to Rushdie, which is more yearned for than real and which is constructed out of the fragments of "a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and circumstance...." (p. 10). The notion of a global Muslim community, a symbolic nation of Muslims, has also been fuelled, according to Said (1979) by Orientalist constructions of Muslims as indistinguishable from one another. Thus the construct of Ummah as signalling homogeneity or unproblematic belonging is contested both as an idea and an ideal.

The coalition in this study is attempting to construct a prototype, for which there has been no template in recent Canadian history, but for which, as is demonstrated in the next section of this chapter, there is pressing need. The group's founders were all leaders

in significant Muslim organizations in Edmonton, and all could see the value and necessity of the Coalition. However, one of the significant challenges that they continually face is persuading their own members-at-large of the urgent need for such a group.

In the next section I review some of the socio-political conditions that gave rise to the Coalition and within which Muslim organizations work today.

Background

To better understand some of the constraints within which the Coalition in this study operates, both a brief sketch of the contemporary political reality of Muslims in the West and a cursory review of the current state of Muslim coalitional organizing is presented in this section. This information provides some insight into the sometimes precarious and dangerous socio-political reality of Canadian Muslims and the identity challenges that they face in organizing.

Canadian Muslim Demographics

Official census data on the number of Muslims in Canada has not been continuously collected over time. Some figures are available until 1941, and then there is a gap of 40 years when no official data were collected (Hamdani, 1999, p. 198). By 2001 the Muslim population in Canada had grown to over 650,000 (Zaman; as cited in Scholes, 2002, p. 413). However, what these numbers fail to communicate is the diversity within the Muslim community, which, according to Hamdani, contributes to misunderstandings between Canadians and Muslims and, I would add, among Muslims themselves. Indeed, Hamdani pointed out that Muslims appear to have had little interest in undertaking any

kind of rigorous census within the community, and most scholarship and research in this issue has come from outside of the Muslim community.

Current Socio-political Conditions

Religious and political leaders and public and private intellectuals have all contributed to the pool of sentiments that situate Islam as the root of Western troubles (Michael, 2003). Samuel Huntington (1993), citing Bernard Lewis, a contemporary Orientalist, warned that the Muslim world is about to rise against the West and that this rising "is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both" (p. 32).

In light of this type of analysis, some European nations have begun to rethink their 'generosity' towards Muslim immigrants (fearing the impact on their own cultures) and are considering changing their immigration laws to protect their society from both the reproductive and the cultural threat of Muslims (Razack, 2004, 2005). Closer to home, Muslim anxieties about their place in Canada are embodied in two incidents, one quite spectacular and the other disturbing by the lack of press coverage that it received. The first is the case of Maher Arar. On the basis of what turned out to be incorrect information from the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, Mr. Arar was 'deported' to Syria (although he is a Canadian citizen) when he attempted to return home to Canada from a trip to the United States. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in full cooperation with the CIA, facilitated this deportation, and the Canadian government spent many months dragging its heels on the case (Mayeda, 2006). Only through the dogged determination of his wife and support of one of the federal opposition political

parties was he eventually returned to Canada. While in Syria, Mr. Arar was beaten and tortured.

More recently, Dr. Ahmed Farooq was forced to deplane before take-off because his fellow passengers did not feel safe flying with a Muslim aboard (CBC News, 2006). Although Dr. Farooq did not pose any security threat, he was not allowed to resume his flight nor was any sort of compensatory gesture made. From these two instances we see that Canadian citizenship and innocence are not sufficient to protect Muslims from fear and suspicion.

Conflicts such as the Israel/Palestine conflict, both US invasions of Iraq, the 2002 invasion of Afghanistan, the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, the 2005 train bombings in Britain and Spain, and 9/11 will continue to impact the lives of Muslims who live in the West in the foreseeable future. Muslims, implicated as the 'cause' of these conflicts, are constantly called upon to clarify their allegiances. However, as John Michael (2003) noted:

> Most of us understand ourselves to have many different allegiances and those allegiances often conflict. One might well understand oneself to be an American patriot and a committed pacifist. When the United States responds with violence to violence directed against it which identity should predominate? (p. 712)

The complex, contextual, and contested nature of identities and allegiances generates questions about who we are, what our ethics are, how we construct our notions of other and act upon those constructions; and they are all questions of conscience, intellect, and heart. Neither identity nor allegiance can be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' (Michael, 2003).

However, the Muslim community is often held to account when acts of hostility are perpetrated by an Arab or Muslim, regardless of location or disconnection from the

local community. Indeed, often *Arab* and *Muslim* are conflated, which dismisses the complexities of these two communities. Not all Muslims are Arab—in fact, most are not—and not all Arabs are Muslim; many are Christian, Jewish, or hold other beliefs. Yet when Arabs or Muslims are killed by Western armies or their allies, there is an expectation from some quarters in the West that Muslims must understand that these wars are happening for the *benefit* of Muslims. Western armies are portrayed as liberating, as freeing Muslims/Arabs from either misogynistic male domination (Afghanistan), the sadism of its dictators (Iraq), or the fanaticism of its religious leaders (Hezbollah in Lebanon). However, Muslim/Arabs in warfare, according to the stereotype, are expressing their

> essential identity as religious fanatics. Their specific experiences of a world in which Western military fortifications appear unbidden on Arab lands need not be considered. Meanwhile, our [the West's] own actions, and the actions of those with whom "we" identify, are always more complicated and contingent. (Michael, 2003, p. 711)

Muslims responses to these socio-political conditions have generally not been concerted. An Internet search using the terms *Muslim*, *coalitions*, *organizations*, *alliances*, and *Islam* revealed that broad-based, sustained organizing tends to be of a more religious nature. For example, the Islamic Society of North America (and its Canadian branch) is predominantly focused on the religious life of Muslims; in particular, Sunni Muslims. Although some events in the past have spurred the formation of short-term, single-issue initiatives, only recently have *Muslims* in the West begun to think about working across their internal differences to resist the invidious effects of racialization or other forms of identity-based discrimination. Furthermore, Muslims have yet to work consistently with other social justice groups to resist racism, sexism, or homophobia.

Muslim Coalitions and Alliances

Traditionally, Muslim organizing has centered on individual places of worship and on organizing to meet the localized or particular religious and social needs of a mosque, *masjid*, *imambarghah*, *jammat khana*, and so forth. Although there has been some limited cross-sectoral interaction through attendance at fundraisers or social events, coalitional organizing to address shared political issues or social issues has been limited, especially coalitions that include Sunni and Shi'a Muslims working together. However, the contemporary political and socio-religious issues that Muslims face from within and without have begun to catalyze Muslim multisectoral organizing. The Muslim community is beginning to mobilize to become politically active. Rather than understanding this as an issue of religion, Muslims are reconsidering the nature of discrimination. I review examples of three organizations here that have differently conceptualized Muslim issues in Canada as being beyond religion to highlight the non-monolithic nature of community organizing. One is a women's organization, one is an online organization for gay/lesbian/transgendered and bi-sexual Muslims, and the final organization is the Coalition, which is the subject of this study.

One of the earliest examples of successful coalition organizing in the Muslim community in Canada is the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), founded in Edmonton in 1982 by Dr. Lila Fahlman. It was the first multisect and multiethnic Muslim organization in Canada and has operated continually since then as a national organization with branches in most major Canadian cities. Its focus is on Muslim women's issues both

internal to the community (such as Sharia Law[1]) and external (such as racism). Since its inception, CCMW has focused on issues involving women's rights—to be safe from harm, to participate fully in the Canadian polity, to advocate for equity within Islam and Muslim communities, and to be free of the effects of racialization. Its activities range from research and publication to political action and public and self-education.

The Al-Fatiha Foundation is "an international grassroots organization for Muslims and their friends" (Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, & Varga, 2005, p. 116) that exists as a virtual online forum as well as organizing conferences and workshops. It was founded in 1997 and has over 700 members, mostly in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Its activities focus on support, outreach, and the promotion of "Islamic notions of social justice, peace and tolerance" (p. 116). It provides a safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Muslims to share their struggles with regard to reconciling their faith with their sexual orientation. Being a queer Muslim is extremely difficult, and like other Abrahamic faiths, Islam is ambivalent at best and hostile at worst towards the LGBTQ community at large and mostly silent about queer Muslims. However, recently (in 2006) some progress has been made in Britain with regard to exploratory talks between the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and Stonewall, a British gay charity, to work together in the future on projects (Shoffman, 2006).

The third coalition (referred to as the Coalition) is the one featured in this study that was formed in the wake of September 11, 2001. At the time of its formation, it was unique in Canada for working across sectoral lines. Whereas CCMW has individual

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[1] *Sharia Law* refers to the bodies of legal thought associated with the various schools of interpretation of the Quran and the Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed [PBUH]). There is no one singular body of Law.

members from many Muslim sects, the Coalition has gained support at the organizational level for this type of coalitional work. This high-level support for the Coalition has provided credibility to the organization (it speaks for thousands of Muslims) while at the same time challenged the group to engage with intra-community complexities. It has since been asked to consult with other communities that are attempting the same type of coalition work.

Several prominent members of the Muslim community in Edmonton recognized that the potential for a violent backlash against Muslims (in the wake of September 11) was not only possible, but also likely. After an initial meeting, consensus was formed around the need for such a group, and a series of team-building workshops brought together Muslims from the dominant sects of Islam and a range of orthodoxies within them. From the outset the organization has attempted to focus on political action and solidarity. Its broad vision is to address the legacy of Orientalism by seeking to change the nature of the racialized discourse in Edmonton. Through dialogue with the public school board, it has succeeded in having input into social studies curricula; and in a productive partnership with the university, it has been able to establish a chair in Islamic studies. Finally, it endeavours to facilitate connections among its various constituencies to broaden their own understanding of the diversity of Muslims in Edmonton.

The political and social conditions that Muslims face within the Canadian and global context necessitate a different type of organizing. These organizations will have to be flexible with respect to setting goals and objectives and take into account a range of identities and concerns while developing analyses that are more complex than simplistic. They will also have to become adept at building networks of support and activism.

Coalition work, with its emphasis on organizing and engaging difference, may be what is needed to marshal the kinds of resources that Muslims will require to face these challenges.

Significance

This study has the potential to contribute to the fields of antiracist organizing and education in three ways. It can serve to increase understanding between Canadian Muslims and Canadian non-Muslims through the narratives of the interviewees, which serve to interrupt the myth of the monolithic Muslim community and the singular Muslim identity. It builds on and contributes to theorizing about antiracism coalition work. In particular, it adds to integrative antiracist theorizing as well as coalitional theorizing. Finally, it provides practical and strategic information for researchers, organizers, activists, and community-based adult educators. Most important, I hope that it will spur further research within the Muslim communities by both those who identify as Muslims and others. With respect to those working in various capacities in grassroots racialized or Muslim organizations, this study provides insight into the strategies and challenges of engaging identity differences in coalitional contexts. Similarly, organizers may find the study helpful in terms of understanding how to attract a broad range of coalition partners. For activists on the front lines, this study provides a way to describe, deconstruct, and discuss the complexities of identity, identity differences, and their meaning for equitable working relationships. And for adult educators working in grassroots community organizing, this study can provide a theoretical basis for developing informal programs of learning.

Theoretical Approach

In this section I present the themes that guided my approach to and analysis of the research. Because the study is about how identities situate, separate, and oppress, I required a theoretical framework within which to think about identity. This study is also concerned with how people organize across identity differences; therefore, I required a theoretical framework for understanding how people act collectively in the face of multiple identity differences. My own belief system compels me to use theories that challenge essentialisms and highlight the ways in which difference is both conceptualized and expressed in the organization of racialized groups. Therefore, in this study I have drawn upon themes from Stuart Hall's (1990, 1996, 1997) work on identity and Bystydzienski and Schacht's (2001) emerging theory of radical coalitional alliances.

Stuart Hall

The challenge in working with theories that are broadly poststructural and postmodern is that it is easy to get lost in the subtleties of the postmodern discursive subject and Foucauldian networks of power. However, I have found that key themes from Stuart Hall's work on culture and identity were helpful in framing an understanding of identity that is neither essentialist nor so esoteric that it cannot be spoken of. The themes that are most helpful in this study are identity as *identification*, the role of *difference* in identification, and *binary oppositions*.

Identity as identification. Identity for Hall (1997) has ceased to be a stable, fixed, circumscribed, and completed, filled vessel and has become "a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relations to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (p. 277). Whereas identity is a 'thing,'

identification is a set of processes; it might help to think of identification as a verb and identity as a noun. The former tells us how we do something (identify ourselves in the world, in this moment), and the latter fixes both our characteristics and our relationships to others in an absolute way. "The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one" (Hall, 1996; p. 3). Hall's theory of identity challenges the notion of race and culture as "eternally fixed in some essentialized past" (Hall, 1990, p. 225) outside of the "continual play of history" (p. 225), making it particularly useful in this study of a racialized group that is challenging racialization and stereotyping.

Forms of differentiation. In the absence of 'essences' that dictate the nature and quality of every 'thing,' Hall (1996, 1997) contended that we can know the quality of a thing only against that which it is not. Thus, one way that I can know that I am a Canadian is because I do not have citizenship in any other country. This process of differentiating one thing from another can, but does not have to, necessitate the creation of the 'Other' as the opposite or alien. Difference can be neutral, or it can be viewed as "creative and necessary force for change" (Lorde, 1984, p. 134).

Within some frameworks and discourses, however, both the concept of difference and the differentiated thing are viewed as problematic. Reductive or binary differences or binary opposites (which mean mostly the same thing) are an example of a potentially problematic form of differentiating. A binary opposite denotes that two qualities or constructed categories are the inverse of each other. Sometimes those opposites are construed as benign; however, other binaries embody entire structures of power and understanding. When this is the case, one aspect of the binary is privileged; the other is

not. An example of this type of binary forms the basis of Edward Said's (1979) seminal work, *Orientalism.* In it he laid out a case for a sweeping West-East binary. In this class of differences the West is imbued with characteristics that situate it as perpetually superior to the East. *West* signifies the Enlightenment and scientific rationalism, whereas *East* signifies the opposite of enlightenment and scientific rationalism; ergo, it is irrational, unscientific, and without benefit of the arts and sciences of the age of enlightenment.

Identity difference is also understood, according to Hall (1997), in a classificatory sense. That is, differences are used to catalogue and order. In terms of culture, race, gender, and other identity categories, this serves to separate, situate, and fix identity according to purportedly inherent qualities. This view of difference is troubled when a trait, characteristic, or quality does not fit into one of the categories. In essentialist frameworks of identity, such *hybridity* ruptures the cataloguer's sense of the natural order of things. This is problematic in theories of cultural and racial identity in which borders and order provide the underlying logic. According to Hall (1996, 1997), these ruptures or transgressions are viewed with antagonism. This concept is useful in understanding how people who encounter difference understand and respond to it.

Coalitions Across Difference

The work of radical feminists in coalitions stands as an object lesson in the challenges of working across difference. Anzaldua (2002), Lorde (1984), Reagon (2000), and Sudbury (1998, 2001) all discussed the need for social-justice activists to develop theories of organizing across differences. In *Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalitional Politics for the New Millennium*, Bystydzienski and Schacht

(2001) examined "how group identification influences the formation of alliances" (p. 2). In particular, they used non-essentialist understandings of identities and the notion of differentiation to attend to the formation of binaries, exclusions, and inequities within coalitions.

The notion of coalitions as radical alliances across difference entails focusing on the reality that groups of people acting together are always working with difference. Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) suggested that coalitions need to "move beyond the assumption that shared social characteristics and experiences alone are the only meaningful ways collective identities can be created and instead explore new possibilities for how otherwise disparate people can act together" (p. 7). Contrary to neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses, Islam is deeply heterogeneous. Any Muslim coalition will be dealing with at least gender, class, and sexuality differences. However, the multinational nature of the Muslim diaspora in Canada and the many sects that exist within those national and ethnic diasporas compound the complexities of identity and experiences. Therefore, Muslims need a theory of coalition building that expressly addresses the challenges of working across difference.

Important themes from this emerging theory focus on acknowledging and attending to the "hierarchy of oppression" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 5) and examining discourses that circulate within the group to influence positionalities. To be able to deal with these processes, a coalition must be intentional about cultivating an awareness of how certain identities within the group have privilege over others. This theory suggests that dialogic communicative processes and the careful construction and maintenance of democratic processes are crucial for coalition longevity and success.

Healthy coalition processes are developed at an interpersonal and a structural level. At the interpersonal level, coalitions members (a) work to recognize and acknowledge *individuals*' experiential differences; (b) "conduct an open and honest appraisal of how privilege based on gender, race, class, sexuality, age or other factors is played out in the specific relationship or alliance" (p. 10); and (c) find common ground among values, goals, principles, and experiences. At a structural level it is important for coalitions to work to (a) create structures that are "fluid, flexible and participatory" (p. 12) to create democratic spaces, (b) attend to "hierarchical privileging of the agendas of some over other" (p. 12), and (c) use dialogue to facilitate equitable patterns of communication and contribution.

Bystydzienski and Schacht's (2001) theorizing about coalition work addresses the difficult realities that coalitions confront within their complex membership. It is particularly well suited to this study to help make sense of the struggles that the Coalition in this study experiences in working across multiple, complex, and often hidden differences in identity, values, ideology, and experience.

Outline of Thesis

Chapter 1 has outlined the purpose, context, nature, and theoretical orientation of the study. Chapter 2 reviews key literature, focusing on Muslim identity, identity theories from a racial and cultural perspective, and coalition organizing across complex differences. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework for conducting the research and the methods of data collection, analysis, and writing, as well as the particular challenges of working within one's own community. Chapters 5 and 6 present the

findings of the study, and chapter 6 discusses the findings. Chapter 7 presents concluding comments, including recommendations for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 2:

IDENTITIES, COALITIONS, AND MUSLIMS

Introduction

In keeping with the parameters of this study, I focus on reviewing selected literature related to identity and coalitional organizing that approaches the subject from the perspective of race, ethnicity, or culture. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section reviews the literature related to historic and contemporary essentializations of Muslim identity. The second section reviews anti-essentialist literature and includes subsections that discuss the effects of essentialism, anti-essentialist theorizing and its impact on how identity and difference are understood, and responses to anti-essentialism. The third section reviews literature on coalitions and solidarities, with an emphasis on literature that links racialized identity with coalition work.

Orientalism and Its Legacies

Contemporary Muslim identity issues, particularly for those living in the West, have their history in centuries of scholarship and artistic and literary representative practices. The body of work known as *Orientalism* marshals quasi scientific rationale and cultural hegemony to develop and sustain powerful arguments concerning the essential nature of Muslims/Arabs as intellectually, emotionally, and, ultimately, civilizationally inferior to Western peoples and cultures. The disproving of scientific racism and biological determinism have not mitigated the power of the Orientalist image of the East and Muslims; therefore, it is salient to any study concerning contemporary Muslim identities.

To trace the trajectory of Orientalism through to contemporary manifestations of it, I begin with Said's (1979) work on Orientalism and its impact on the construction and essentialization of Muslim identity in the West. Then I review contemporary manifestations of Orientalism: the racialization of Muslims, culturalism and Muslims, and Islamophobia. I conclude this subsection with a review of several studies on the presence and nature of stereotypes that permeate both scholarly and popular cultural media. Finally, I review the literature on current forms of Muslim organizing that I see as a reflection of the complex nature of the community and its manifold responses to identity issues.

Said and Orientalism

Orientalism refers to the many bodies of scholarly, artistic, and literary work whose focus is on that part of the world understood to be *the Orient*. The first thing that Said (1979) made perfectly clear in his seminal work on this field of study is that "neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability" (p. xvii). Both 'the East' and 'the West' are categories that human minds have constructed in order to know the Other. How the Orient comes to be known by the scholar of Orientalism and, by extension, the peoples of the West is not through any attempt to understand the lived experiences of 'the oriental'; the West comes to know the Orient and Orientals though the Orientalists' *ideas* about it. What is so devastating about this form of representative knowledge, according to Said, is that the subjective realities of 'the Oriental' are obscured from the student or the reader. One particular example that Said provided is Flaubert's account of an Egyptian courtesan that, through Flaubert's writings, becomes "a widely influential model of the Oriental woman" (p. 6). The trouble with this is not the

rendering of his experience into words, which is the purview of a writer, but the misrepresentation of his experience as both an objective and a totalizing fact. In failing to note the particularities of the experience and that it was a construction, the woman becomes the embodiment of 'Egyptian women.' Never, according to Said, does Flaubert allow her to speak to the reader with her own voice; she cannot say who she is and how she has come to be who she is in this historical moment. Flaubert obliterated this woman and every other Egyptian woman as well by reducing them all to *his experience* of one particular woman. What is known to the reader is how Flaubert experienced the courtesan; however, what is incorporated into the field of Orientalist scholarship is another fact about Muslim/Arab culture and identity.

From these sorts of singular encounters of the Orient, the Orientalist draws conclusions about 'oriental Arab/Muslim' that consist of an a-contextual cataloguing of traits that has served over centuries to build up a view of the Muslim or Arab Oriental that in part serves to reaffirm Western civilization, rationality, progress, and enlightenment. However, eventually, according to Said (1979), Orientalism serves European and later American interests in the East and, in particular, in the Middle East.

Although anything approaching a full discussion of this book and the field it describes is beyond both the scope and purpose of this review of the literature, two aspects of Orientalism provide an important context within which to consider contemporary understandings of Islam and Muslims. First, Said (1979) carefully described how various fields of scholarship and the arts contributed to the aggregation, reification, and conflation of multiple ethnic, religious, geographic, and linguistic groups of people into the category of Muslim or Arab. Second, through hundreds of years of

scholarship, the term and identity category *Oriental*, and later *Muslim/Arab*, have come to represent the Orient's relationship to the West. Embedded in the words themselves are "an enduring Oriental reality and an opposing but no less enduring Western essence, which observes the Orient from afar and from, so to speak, above" (p. 333).

Orientalism's power, then, is both discursive and epistemological. Only once a people or a place is described by the Orientalist scholar can those people or that place become knowable to the West. More than anything else, Orientalism "is a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness." (Said, 1979, p. 6). To know the East, and by extension in this case, Muslims and Islam, one must go through the West and, in particular, Western scholarship. Its lasting power, according to Said, lies in both the vastness of the work and its internal coherence. Within its framework all of the claims make sense, which gives power to its truths that resonates today in contemporary expressions of essentialisms reflected in Islamophobia, the racialization of Islam, and in what Razack (2004) called *culturalism*.

Culturalism as an Expression of Orientalist Essentialism

Razack's (2004) analysis of the European response to family violence and forced marriage reflects the culturalist notion that Muslims can be integrated into the fabric of a Western society only if they are 'deculturalized.' Muslim culture, viewed as static and in perpetual contradiction to European culture, requires that the Muslim immigrant be subject to "the force of law to bring them into modernity" (p. 138). Although only a small percentage of Norwegian Pakistani Muslim families practice forced marriages, it is viewed as being emblematic of the tribal, pre-modern nature of 'the Muslim culture' that

privileges kinship ties over individual rights and freedoms. According to Razack, some influential European scholars and community activists, including feminists, view this attachment to the extended family as repudiation of individuality and free will, which the aforementioned scholars consider to be the hallmarks of civilization. These kinship ties bind young women to the wishes of their extended families. In Muslim culture, according to this analysis, the family is dominated by the Muslim man, which makes it an inherently dangerous place for Muslim women. This view of the family and women does two things: It reinforces the Orientalist notion of the Muslim man as misogynist, from whom the voiceless Muslim woman requires rescue, and it subordinates the Muslim woman to the Western woman, who must save her from her culture.

This divide, according to the Razack's (2004) interpretation of the predominant European view, can be eradicated only through a systematic effort to deculturalize Muslims using educational programming, surveillance, and the modification of immigration laws. The education is intended for Muslim youth and can be used to counter the privileging of the family over the individual and to promote "the virtues of romantic love" (p. 139). This view of the *Muslim as Other* fails on multiple counts, according to Razack (2004). It fails to recognize "the West's complicity in placing those populations under siege both before they leave their homelands and once within Europe's borders" (p. 132), and by essentializing both Muslim and Western women, it fails to allow for the abuse of Western women and for the already emancipated Muslim woman. The outcome of culturalist analyses may well be that spaces in which "progressive Muslims can internally contest patriarchal narratives" (p. 161) are foreclosed. Although Razack (2004) made it very clear that she condemns any type of violence against women,

she insisted that any response to such violence must fall within the rubric of antiracist as well as feminist activism.

The Racialization of Muslims and Orientalism

In this section I will examine research that suggests that Orientalism and culturalism have contributed to the stereotypical attributes of phenotypical, religious, and cultural natures being ascribed to all Muslims. This phenomenon is known as *racialization*, and according to Joshi (2006), it explains the virulent discrimination that Muslims face. It also contributes, as I shall take up later in this chapter, to a false binary between Muslim and non-Muslim.

Joshi (2006) suggested that racialization is ultimately an essentializing project that conflates race and religion. Phenotypes and religious and cultural markers become attributed to a particular religion, regardless of the veracity of the attribution. Thus South Asian or Arab features become conflated with Islam even though not all Arabs or South Asians are Muslim and not all Muslims have dark or brown skin. These conflations (race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion) and erasures (multiple and subjective expressions and the experience of each that are lost in the conflation) reflect "Orientalist underpinnings" (p. 217). Because Islam and therefore Muslims are viewed as a threat to Western civilization (Halliday, 1999; Joshi, 2006; Modood; 2003; Razack, 2004; Said, 1979; Werbner, 2000), world events such as September 11, 2001, which involved the racialized group in some way, sometimes result in a spike in acts of violence committed against those who are believed to be part of the racialized group. The outcomes of racialization, Joshi contended, are both normative (Islam/all Muslims are enemies of Western civilization) and material (physical assault/murder; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004;

Joshi, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2006) and involve discrimination in employment, education, healthcare provision (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004) and vandalism of property identified with Islam or Muslims, such as places of worship, cemeteries, and schools (Sway, 2005).

In spite of Muslim visibility and its depiction as a distinct category in popular culture and the media, in neither Britain nor the United States do Muslims have either protected or visible-minority status. Therefore they cannot claim protection against hate crimes under the law. This leaves Muslims both vulnerable because of their identity and without legal recourse on the basis of that identity (Elia, 2006; Joshi, 2006).

Islamophobia and Its Relations to Orientalism, Culturalism, and Racialization

Orientalism, culturalism, and the racialization of Muslims have served, in their way, to portray Muslims as homogeneous. This has made it easier to ignore or deny the complexity and nonfixity of the identity of Muslim. In concert, these modes of representing and (mis)understanding Muslims have led to acts of discrimination that reflect racist motivations. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) defined *racism* as "modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation that present specific and different characters in different social and historical contexts." (p. 2). Racism can arise when an identifiable group has been reduced and essentialized in a way that situates them as outsiders or a threat to the dominant cultural or national identity (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993; Armstrong, 2005; Goldberg, 2000). *Islamophobia* is a particular form of racism that targets Muslims through social, political, and cultural exclusions. This socio-political context in which the contemporary Muslim finds him- or herself has had an impact on how and why Muslims organize or do not organize, as well as on how they

understand their identities as citizens of Western nations. The literature in this section evidences the presence and effects of Islamophobia, or fear of the Muslim Other, which is fuelled, in part, by a history of essentializing Orientalism that has led to racialization (Joshi, 2006) and culturalism (Razack, 2004).

Zine (2006) defined Islamophobia as "fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination" (p. 239). Poynting and Mason (2006) claimed that the term Islamophobia was coined in the United States and exported to Britain and then Australia. Islamophobia has resulted in attacks on Muslims or those perceived to be Muslims. These attacks can manifest in individual behaviours such as verbal and physical assault or through institutions such as laws and policies (Razack, 2004, 2005; Sway, 2005). Islamophobia shares in common with Orientalism, culturalism, and racialization the categorization of a certain group of people as being distinct and identifiable and in a binary relationship with the dominant group. In the case of Muslims and Islam, this binary echoes the Orientalist trope that says that the West comprises freedom-loving peoples, whereas Islam embodies a freedom-hating set of fundamental values. This contributes to the perception of immigrant-receiving Western countries that Muslims cannot be integrated into the host society (Modood, 2003; Razack, 2004).

Islamophobia has not remained constant and some (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Poynting & Mason, 2006; Werbner, 2000) have identified spikes in its manifestations that correspond to social and political events. The first British spike arose out of the Muslim response to Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses.* Both the

ensuing *fatwa*[2] and some British Muslims' support of it demonstrated to Britons the "inherently fanatical, violent and irrational tendencies" (Werbner, 2000, p. 307) of Muslim leadership and the willingness of Muslims to follow them without question. This contributed to a sense that Muslims are "always-already hostile to democracy" (Elia, 2006, p. 156) and inassimilable (Razack, 2004). Subsequent increases have followed the September 11 attacks, the Spanish and London bombings, and the arrests of second-generation Muslim men implicated in the latter (Poynting & Mason, 2006).

Islamophobic, racialist, and culturalist essentialisms all make use of the Orientalist framework, which situates Muslims as culturally, racially, and civilizationally alien to the West. The political, social, and cultural means of producing and disseminating information about Muslims continue to reinforce rather than counter (mis)understanding and have resulted in the production of powerful visual stereotypes that in turn reinforce 'Western' ideas about Muslims and Islam.

The Stereotyping of Muslims in Various Media

This section examines the nature and pervasiveness of Arab/Muslim stereotypes as they appear in popular culture. The literature in this area has demonstrated linkages between essentialized portrayals of Arabs/Muslims in Orientalism, racialization and Islamophobia, and contemporary cultural representations. Failing to acknowledge the contextual and contested nature of Muslim identities, these stereotypical images paradoxically contribute to the very social forces through which Muslim identities in the West become constituted. That is, the portrayal of Muslims as savage, backward, and

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[2] The *fatwa*, or legal pronouncement, convicted Rushdie of apostasy and condemned him to death. It was issued out of Iran by the Ayatollah Khomeini and supported by some Muslim leaders in Britain and North America.

hostile to the West generates hostility, fear, and suspicion that, when socially produced as Islamophobia, constitute the social context within which Muslim identity is reformed and performed. Stereotypes are symptomatic of underlying essentialisms: They are what the community can point at as evidence of what is experienced as more subtle forms of racism and discrimination. Orientalism, racialization, and Islamophobia provide important theoretical frameworks within which to understand the social and political processes that impact the lived realities of Muslims, but it is the concrete representation of these phenomena to which organizations often respond.

Said (1979) noted that "since World War II . . . the Arab and Muslim has become a figure in American popular culture" (p. 284). Almost three decades after Said's comments about the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims, Michael (2003) observed that "the Arab as type remains linked to irrational or religious violence, opulence, sensuality, and evil" (p. 706).

Conducting a review of the literature posed a dilemma for me regarding what to call those who were being stereotyped. The search terms *Muslim* and *stereotyping* yielded literature that dealt with both Arab and Muslim stereotyping, which indicates that the terms are used interchangeably and that even scholarly literature uses the terms interchangeably, which, as pointed out in previous sections, is inaccurate. The demands of rigor, clarity, and validity seem to preclude such conflations and interchange; however, it is unavoidable if I want to draw upon as much of the literature as possible. Thus I reviewed the literature on both Arab and Muslim stereotyping for two reasons, the most important of which was to try to include as much of the relevant literature as possible; and second, by demonstrating this confusion and conflation with a forward slash (/), I

wish to foreground this ongoing linguistic and conceptual error, which is one remnant of Orientalism that confuses and blurs any distinctions amongst a vast range of peoples, cultures, languages, and histories. This essentializing, in part, makes possible the production of stereotypes that reduce Arabs/Muslims to a few spare and terrible images in the minds of many in the West.

Following the trail of images portrayed in written and visual texts from 1896 to the present, we can extrapolate from them the dominant stereotype of the moment and in some cases the place of the Arab/Muslim in the minds and politics of the West. Early imagery conformed to some of the more prominent Orientalist images of the Muslim/Arab oriental. "Rudolph Valentino, [who] . . . dressed like an Arab sheikh" (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006, p. 205), is perhaps the quintessential Arab/Muslim male of the time—exotic, mysterious, and perhaps slightly dangerous. Early images of women consisted largely of the harem girl or belly dancer (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006; Michael, 2003).

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab was often depicted as "the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat" (Said, 1979, p. 285). However, oil politics and other imperial ambitions in the Middle East triggered a more menacing image of, in particular, Muslim men. The "rapacious bandit" (Shaheen, 1994, p. 123) from earlier times is recalled in "cartoons depicting an Arab Sheik standing behind a gasoline pump, . . . clearly 'Semitic': their sharply hooked noses, the evil moustachioed leer on their faces" (Said, 1979, p. 286). The most recent images of the Arab or Muslim are gendered and stark—the terrorist man and the subservient woman, both of whom conform to old Orientalist archetypes of the dangerous yet mute Arab (Sway, 2005; Elia, 2006; Michael,

2003; Razack, 2004; Said, 1979; Shaheen, 1994, 2003). From editorial cartoons that depict Osama Bin Laden (Joshi, 2006), to the Danish cartoons that portray Mohammed as a bomber, to comic-book villains (Shaheen, 1994), nondocumentary images of Muslim/ Arab continue to associate the phenotypical Semitic-Arab, with his "large turban, protrusive nose and beady eyes" (Joshi, 2006, p. 218), with acts of violence (Joshi, 2006; Michael, 2003; Shaheen, 1994).

In print and television media, language has also been used to stereotype Muslims/ Arabs. The consistent and persistent use of derogatory adjectives such as *terrorist* and *militant*, juxtaposed with the words *Islamic/Muslim/Arab*, has reinforced the image of Arab/Muslim as both dangerous and the enemy (Joshi, 2006; Tessler, 2003). In a discourse analysis of George Bush's speeches immediately following September 11, 2001, Merskin (2005) showed how the Arab/Muslim was constructed as "the enemy." Like the term *oriental*, the word *enemy* is imbued, Merskin contended, with a wealth of meanings. If people are our enemies, we know, for example, that they "have destructive intentions towards our group" or that their values repudiate ours (p. 160). Therefore, when George Bush invoked the Arab/Muslim world as a force of enmity in those speeches, he was able to communicate a whole range of hostilities and differences as being both irreconcilable and deadly (Merskin, 2005).

The power of these negative images is exacerbated by the absence of portrayals of Arab/Muslim identities as complex and contextual (Merskin, 2005; Shaheen, 1994, 2003). "A lack of representation (symbolic annihilation) can also reinforce stereotypes" (Merskin, 2005, p. 165); and in an analysis of comic-book portrayals of Arabs/Muslims from the 1950s to 1994, Shaheen found no Arab/Muslim heroes. Even the 'benevolent'

characters were "passive, . . . playing minor roles" (p. 123). In a similar study of almost 1,000 American films, Shaheen (2003) found only two positively portrayed Arabs/ Muslims.

Finally, the veiled Muslim woman has become symbolic of at least two aspects of Muslim identity. First, it represents the "undifferentiated sex drive" (Said, 1979, p. 312) of the Muslim man from which the Muslim woman must be protected (Elia, 2006); and second, it represents the Muslim woman/non-Muslim woman binary. In this binary the Muslim women is unfree, undifferentiated, and without voice, a perpetual victim waiting to be rescued from her culture; whereas the Western woman is individuated, self-expressive, potent, and self-actualized (Michael, 2003; Razack, 2004; Shaheen, 1994, 2003). This latter image of the perpetually oppressed and voiceless woman has become a *cause célèbre* for some Western feminists (Rantanen, 2005; Razack, 2004). Both Rantanen and Razack called for feminists to employ both an antiracist and a feminist analysis in taking up important women's issues such as domestic violence and the political oppression of women abroad.

To summarize, the construction of the Muslim as an outsider to and the enemy of the peoples of the West has in part been accomplished through the process of racialization—a process assisted by the lingering effects of hundreds of years of Orientalist scholarship. The Arab/Muslim racialized, orientalized, and 'Other' is now something to be feared as well as scorned. This combination of fear and scorn has helped to fuel the resultant Islamophobia, with unfortunate results for Arabs/Muslims who live in the West, including Western Europe, Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. One of the effects of all of these forms of essentialism has been the proliferation of

dehumanizing stereotypical images in the media and popular culture. According to Shaheen (2003), and Razack (2005) this proliferation and its impact on Muslims have gone largely unquestioned by non-Muslims/non-Arabs, and the voices of Muslim/Arab critics have, for the most part, been ignored. Without the countervailing effect of images that portray Muslims as complex, self-aware subjects (Michael, 2003; Shaheen, 1994, 2003), the racialization of Muslims and the resultant Islamophobia continue unabated (Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Joshi, 2006). The question remains, how can Muslim communities subvert and counter the essentializing triad of Orientalism, racialization, and Islamophobia?

Muslim Communities Respond to Essentialisms

These socio-political contexts in which contemporary Muslims find themselves both constrain and propel organizational responses and activism. The construction of this Muslim 'Other,' the 'them' to the Western 'us,' has, according to Modood (2003), been a factor in the political organizing of Muslims (p. 101). Muslim organizations and communities have attempted to respond to increased racism and a reduction in their civil liberties while under increased surveillance since September 11, 2001 (Ismael & Measor, 2003; Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003; Razack, 2004; Swiney, 2006). Thus the confluent essentializing phenomena of Orientalism, culturalism, racialization, and Islamophobia constitute the incubator within which Muslim identities, both individual and collective, form and re-form. How have Muslim communities and the organizations responded to the bombardment of images and words that vilify, isolate, and marginalize? How do they deconstruct and understand the category Muslim in the face of these totalizing and stereotypical representations? How do their organizations reflect the

complexity of Muslim identities? This section reviews some of the literature related to Muslim organizations and how they use negative representations of Muslim identity to rally and organize the communities that they attempt to represent. This section also seeks to discover from the literature whether identity is being problematized both specifically as it relates to Muslims and at the conceptual level.

According to Werbner (2000), Muslim identity is "complex, negotiated, contested and historically unstable" (p. 314). Like human beings everywhere, Muslims live as self-aware subjects who are constantly negotiating and renegotiating experience in relation to temporal and material considerations (Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Ismail, 2004; Joshi, 2006; Modood, 2003; Michael, 2003; Razack, 2004; Said, 1979; Werbner, 2000). Diasporic hybridity, civic participation, and political activism combine, according to Werbner, to generate multiple debates within the Muslim communities that focus on "reinterpreting the law, in order to adapt it to the realities of everyday life" (p. 314). This is echoed by Ismail who describes the lived experiences of Muslims as arising out "…of the interaction between religion and the social" (p. 620). The challenge for Muslims is to generate a counter discourse to the longstanding and deeply entrenched Orientalist, racialized, and Islamophobic discourses and which more fully reflects the many and varied lived realities of Muslims, particularly in the West.

Muslims who live in the West are taking up essentialisms and binaries imposed from both outside and within their communities. One way that they are doing this is by organizing for the express purpose of educating, advocating, and becoming active in the public sphere. Huda (2006) revealed that in the United States there are "dozens of national and regional organizations" (p. 187) that exist to address issues ranging from

human rights to charity. In a similar survey, Modood (2003) concluded that "Muslim assertiveness, . . . though triggered and intensified by what are seen as attacks on Muslims, is primarily derived not from Islam or Islamism but from contemporary Western ideas about equality and multiculturalism" (p. 109). He reported three main foci of organizations: human rights, response to racism, and 'Muslim power.' The latter refers to a variation of the identity-pride movements, which Modood compared to the Black or gay-pride movements.

According to both Modood (2003) and Huda (2006), the goals and objectives of the various organizations they reviewed are indeed typical for marginalized groups in Western democracies. Table 1 includes a sampling of Muslim organizations and their main objectives. Although this is a limited representation of Muslim organizations, even this small sample indicates a complex set of understandings of the issues that Muslims and their communities face. It also reflects a range of priorities and values from the more traditional (preservation and transmission of religious values and knowledge) to the progressive (opening up spaces within the community for women, minority sexual orientations, secularists). The inherent diversity of the community is, according to Modood and Huda, surfacing multiple alternative discourses to the Orientalist or racialized discourse. However, whether these counter representations are powerful enough to inhibit the growth of Islamophobia, racialization, and the resultant popular stereotypes remains to be seen.

Some important anti-essentialist critiques have emerged since the 1990s that build upon and extend Said's (1979) seminal work, *Orientalism*. In particular, Razack's antiracist feminist critiques serve to demonstrate how contemporary geopolitics, in

Table 1

Main Objectives of a Sample of Muslim Organizations

Muslim organization	Objectives
Council on American Islamic Relations (US)	Promotion of general human and civil rights and antiracism Educating the public at large about diversity within the Muslim communities
Al Masoom (Great Britain, Women's Organization)	Demonstrating against "atrocities in Bosnia and Kashmir" (Werbner, 2000, p. 320) Philanthropy for suffering abroad (non-sectoral)
American Muslim Alliance	Development of leadership Participation in the political system
Zaytouna (US)	"Revive classical training in Islamic jurisprudence and in Qur'anic studies" (Huda, 2006, p. 192)
Islamic Society of North America (US)	Membership is both Sunni and Shi Education of youth in matters of religion
American Society for Muslim Advancement (US)	'Bridge building' between Muslim communities and other communities through interfaith, workshops and cultural activities
Free Muslims Coalition (US)	"Promote secular democratic institutions in the Middle East and in the Muslim world" (Huda, 2006, p. 198)
American Islamic Forum for Democracy	Publicly denounce "religious leaders who preach intolerance" (Huda, 2006, p. 199) Support armed forces and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq Monitor media that is deemed to be "Islamist"
Al Fatiha (US, Canada, Great Britain)	Support LGBTQ Muslims Support in the reconciliation between identity and religion Promote feminist, anti-racist, anti-violent agendas and interpretations of Islam
Muslim Public Affairs Council (US)	Education and surveillance of Muslim community which "stresses zero tolerance for terrorism" (Huda, 2006, p. 194) "And work with local and federal law enforcement agencies" (Huda, 2006, p. 194)
Canadian Council of Muslim Women	Explore and respond to women's issues/social justice Increase Muslim women's participation in Canadian civics and politics Bridge building
Centre for Study of Islam and Democracy (US)	Study of "Islamic and democratic political thought" and the "merging these two streams into a modern Islamic democratic discourse" (Huda, 2006, p. 197)

combination with patriarchy and Orientalism, serve to essentialize Muslims and designate them as the 'cultural other.' Razack (2004) focused on the gendered and sexualized nature of these essentialisms and their effect on family relations (Husain & O'Brien, 2000; Razack, 2004). Modood demythologizes the ways in which Muslims organize by drawing parallels between their aspirations and those of all minority groups. Ismael and Measor (2003) and Shaheen (1994, 2003) examined media and popular cultural bias to demonstrate the ongoing essentialization of Muslims and to surface connections between geopolitics and these representative practices. Although Muslims are organizing to resist the effects of essentialisms and their fallout such as racialization, Islamophobia, and the stereotypes that fuel them, it is equally important for the West to free itself "from its prejudices against and fear of Muslims and Islam" (Siddiqui, 2006, p. 147). The challenge for both is to confront the theoretical fallaciousness of essentialism and to reconceptualize identity and belonging in more nuanced ways than the either/or, superior/ inferior dichotomies and binaries of the essentialized subject.

Identity Essentialism and Its Critics

In the preceding section I reviewed a range of literature that examines very specifically the essentialization of Muslim identities. In this section I broaden the discussion to include literature that theorizes the concepts of identity, essentialism, and anti-essentialism. This theorizing helps to situate the very particular issues that Muslims face within the broader theoretical debates on the meaning of identity and the implications for eschewing or retaining an essentialist understanding of it.

This section has a number of sub themes—identity and difference, binary constructions of identity, hybridity and identity, and identity and performativity—all of which are important concepts derived from critiques of essentialism.

Although I have not intended this review of the literature to be a review of postmodern or poststructural identity theories, it is worth noting that the de-essentializing of identity has taken place within other critiques of the modern with its grand narratives and totalizing truths. Whereas the modern identity is essence manifested, the postmodern identity is expressive and fluid. This expressive understanding of identity is not only not essence it is anti-essence in the sense that it is the negation of the concept of some essence that precedes existence. Anti-essentialism is not some-other-thing; it is not an alternative fixity, but a repudiation of the possibility of an essentialized self.

This section opens with a summary of what is meant by essentialism and its impact on the essentialized. I move on to review key literatures that critique essentialism. Because of the breadth and depth of the literature that analyzes identities and essentialisms, I have limited this review to very select literature that considers identity within the context of oppressions. This section concludes with a discussion of how or even if, identity, both individual and collective, can be understood and expressed outside of essentialized categories and constructions.

Identity Essentialisms and Their Effects

Before I embark on a review of critiques and criticisms of essentialism, it is important to outline what I mean by *essentialism* in this study. Sewpaul (2004) described essentialism as a grand narrative that narrates by naming and attributing; that is, essentialism describes and defines the object of the narration so that it can be known and

understood. It is "the belief that there are properties essential to [every member of a category] and which [all members] share" (Stone, 2004, p. 135). These properties are viewed not as having been derived from within the play of human and social encounters (history), but rather as having been bestowed through metaphysical or biological destinies. Said (1979) explained that this process of defining and reducing the object to its essence forecloses the possibility of members of the identity category being understood other than through the essentialized characteristics. To allow the blurring of identity lines would confound the categorizing of its belonging, the implications of which I will take up in the next section. This naming then becomes "a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the *whatness* of a given entity (Fuss; as cited in Awkward, 1995, p. 175).

According to Heyes (as cited in Stone, 2004), there are four types of essentialism: metaphysical, biological, linguistic, and methodological. Each type contributes to fixity and a-historicity in different but important ways. Metaphysical essentialism suggests that the quality and nature of a thing are independent of social construction, whereas biological essentialism, often used to justify racist and sexist claims, maintains that identity (both individual and collective) is predetermined by genetics. Language plays a role in essentializing as well. Terms such as *the West*, *woman*, or *Muslim* come to have "a fixed and invariant meaning" (p. 137). The unproblematized use of these names can reinforce stereotypes that serve to regulate the individual or group, keeping members in and aliens out, and determine their place in the social order. Finally there is methodological essentialism, which "presupposes[s] the applicability of gender [or other

identity category] as a general category of social analysis" (Heyes; as cited in Stone, 2004, p. 137).

Essentialisms are embedded in everyday language. For example, the terms *maternal* and *paternal* speak to an essentializing idea that men and women are fundamentally different in their orientation to raising children (hooks, 2000). But this difference is not always construed as a "variation on the theme human" (Bannerji, 1995, p. 56): It is not necessarily neutral. Implicit in the essence of things or identities is their locatedness, how they relate to other things or people. In the case of people and identities, relationships between categories of identity point to social relations of power (Bannerji, 2000), but not in any explicit way. The ordering of things occurs in the essential characteristics of the identity/group/individual. In this way, according to Razack (1998), essentialism obscures structures of inequity by making the inequality appear to be endemic to the identity rather than being produced through constructed categories and maintained through power structures. Sewpaul (2004) concurred and claimed that these categorical identities "deny the historical and social construction of their own first principles" (p. 3).

Understood this way, what are the potential consequences of essentialisms, essentializing identities, and essentialized identity categories? The effects of essentialism are many. For my purposes I will limit this discussion to three: the normative, exclusionary, and regulatory effects that identity essentialisms can have on both individuals and groups.

Essentialism achieves a normative effect on people through the process of naming and describing what does and does not constitute a particular identity. One way that this

happens, according to Hall (1997), is through discursive representations. He said that what we come to call knowledge is actually mediated by discourses that are complex systems of representation. Orientalism is an example of a discourse. Discursive representation

> creates a falsehood . . . by a particular *arrangement* [italics added] of existing characteristics. It is the whole discursive organization that is distortive or untrue, not *particular* [italics added] features as such, and it is in their establishment as "essential" that the harm is most palpable. (Bannerji, 2000, p. 161)

Bannerji's (1995) account of experiencing herself as a category—immigrant woman—is a poignant and powerful indicator of the normative effects of essentialisms. She recalled, "I did not even know how to react or name as experience what I felt or say, what was happening to me. . . . Everything . . . was . . . full of denial, rejection and sometimes downright hatred" (p. 7). What she was experiencing, as she explained in *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*, is that what people saw in her was not Himani Bannerji, but rather the discursively essentialized immigrant woman. Media representations, immigration policies that imply the identity category immigrant as problematic, the lack of images of complex immigrant women in popular culture, and so forth all serve to discursively produce and norm how we think about the category, immigrant woman.

But how do essentialisms exclude? One example of this is found within the feminist movement. In the early days of feminism, women's oppression was constructed as occurring through women's confinement to the home sphere. hooks (2000) clearly articulated how as, a dominant feminist discourse in the United States, this homogenized and universalized ideas of women's suffering in such a way that, without any overt statements, the movement excluded women who were not "college educated white

women" (p. 2) yearning for a career. It ignored, she claimed, the millions of poor women, often Black, who *were* working and for whom work, often low paid, had not led to emancipation. In identifying one form of suffering as constituting the female condition as a universal, feminists themselves failed to acknowledge "the interrelatedness of sex, race and class oppression on women" (p. 15). This begged the infamous question (and eponymous book title) *Ain't I a Woman?* (hooks, 1981) in which hooks described the intersection of racism and patriarchy within the feminist movement itself. If the women's movement served to emancipate *women*, yet its constituency was seen as White housewives in middle-class suburbia, where did Black women, so-called Third World women, and women of colour fit within the movement? This failure to develop an analysis based on the intersection of oppressions served to isolate women who were not recognized or represented in the feminist discursive. Butler (1999) suggested that these self/group applications of essentialisms have the effect of mimicking "the strategy of the oppressor" (p. 19), which is to rank and sort membership according to compliance and identification with an ascribed essence.

Belonging to an identity group (gendered, ethnic, cultural, racial, and so forth) constituted upon essentialized identities is often understood as a dichotomous proposition: You are either a member or you are not. The maintenance of group boundaries is not left to chance. Groups or communities are regulated from both outside and within the group (Awkward, 1995; Bannerji, 2000; hooks, 2000). The women's movement is one example of a group's attempt to delineate and regulate identity through group expectations of conformity to a particular understanding and expression of the identity. In the case of the women's movement, *woman* implied, according to Butler

(1999), Bannerji (1995), and hooks (1981, 2000), a heteronormative, white, bourgeois woman, which alienated many women whose experience of the identity woman did not conform to that artificial norm.

In the case of policing racial boundaries, both social and legal prohibitions against what is disturbingly referred to as *miscegenation*, or the mixing of races that produces children, have abounded in history (Coombes & Brah, 2000). Other similar terms have been used to describe the mixing of races, which indicates the presence of strict regulations that amount to the maintenance of identity boundaries. However and by whomever identity boundaries are patrolled and maintained, essentializing distorts the actual degree of group homogeneity and obliterates particularities (Bannerji, 1995, 2000; Butler, 1999; Coombes & Brah, 2000; hooks, 2000, 2000; Lorde, 1984; Razack, 1998; Sewpaul, 2004; Stone, 2004). Whether for good or ill, essentialism tends to privilege the general over the particular, stasis over change, and boundary integrity over fluid and porous boundaries. Essentialism's effects impact those both within and outside of these constructed identity groups.

The Response to Anti-Essentialism: Strategic Essentialism

It is important to attend to criticisms of anti-essentialism, coming as they do from those who have experienced marginalization through problematic essentialisms. Two texts in particular offer compelling and cogent critiques of essentialism. The first is Elia's (2002) *The "White" Sheep of the Family: But Bleaching Is Like Starvation*, and the second is chapter one in Moya's (2002) *Learning From Experience*. Both Elia and Moya suggested that difference and, in particular, the clear demarcation of an identity difference are important for the emancipation of marginalized minorities. From very

different subject positions, they argued that discounting the personal experiences of difference and the effects of differentiation constitutes, in Elia's words, erasure. Difference is not a theoretical problem but an experiential reality. It is born of identifications that, when mediated by oppressive structures such as patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism, mark some as the norm and others as different. In Elia's case, her particular identity has denied her entry into either the world of colour or the world of the West.

As a member of a "non-recognized minority," Elia (2002) reported that "Arab-Americans are possibly the most under-represented U.S. minority group" (p. 226) and that Arab literatures, music, and even food disappear into other categories of identity, while at the same time racial profiling and virulent stereotyping proliferate in the United States, where she lives. Here Elia is describing her identity as being so different as to be not only disavowed, but also banished so far from the norm as to be invisible. Even feminist institutions fail to recognize the particular realities of Arab-American women. Elia addressed the lack of Arab-American feminist work in either White feminist anthologies or anthologies of feminist women of colour. Indeed, in looking through the index of several volumes of postcolonial and feminist works, I surfaced very few references to Arabs, though many other minority groups were in some way represented, Bhabha (1994) described this as being "both overlooked—in the double sense of surveillance and psychic disavowal—and, at the same time, overdetermined—psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic" (p. 339).

In Moya's (2002) critique of the "hegemonic influence of postmodernism" and its impact on theorizing identity and oppression, she eschewed what she referred to as the

"universalizing sameness," a critical theme she revisited several times in this chapter (p. 24). According to Moya, conceptualizing difference as discursively produced leaves "no way to contend with the fact that people experience themselves as different from each other" (p. 24). What she meant by this is that oppression based on experiencing oneself as problematically different becomes theoretical suspect. Moya argued that this sabotages the ability of those who understand their oppression as arising out of their identity to organize collectively.

While both Elia (2002) and Moya (2002) clearly acknowledged the constructed nature of identity categories and neither suggested that identities are essential or fixed, they believed that the invocation of bounded identities can serve a libratory function. What is required of these identities in their categorical forms (such as Arab-American or Chicana) is that they be acknowledged as the site of racism and exclusion. A denial of this or, to use Elia's term, *bleaching* of the category will not lead to emancipation but to erasure (p. 231). Embedded in Moya's call for a strategic essentialism for women of colour and Elia's request to be recognized *as* a woman of colour so that her experience of racism can be actively and coherently resisted and countered, is an affirmation that categorical identities can serve as sites of resistance, problematic as they may be. Both Moya and Elia wanted to name 'it,' claim 'it,' and use 'it' as a site of resistance. The 'it' they want to claim is a bounded identity which is problematic for anti-essentialists but seen as vital for strategic essentialists. Notwithstanding Moya's claims to the contrary, Butler (1999), in fact, expressed a similar sentiment in recognizing that identity essentialism is not only used by dominant social groups, but can also be a tool for politically and socially marginalized groups to "extend [their] visibility and legitimacy"

(p. 3). Various anti-essentialists (Bannerji, 1993, 1995, 2000; Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1999; Hall, 1996, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Razack, 1998; Said, 1979; Trinh, 1989) have theorized and advocated for what Mohanty (2003) described as "a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of a larger political process" (p. 193). This allows for the deconstruction of identity categories while not losing sight of the suffering predicated on, for example, racism, sexism or heterosexism (Lather, 1991).

There is general concurrence between strategic essentialists and anti-essentialists on the role of differences and differentiation in marginalization and oppression. As Elia (2002) pointed out, there is obvious exclusion and oppression on the basis of Arabs being perceived as different, even if that difference is not recognized in law. Both strategic essentialists and anti-essentialists understand that what becomes constructed as problematic differences masks embedded relations of power. For strategic essentialists such as Elia, the conscious use of an identity category as a political maneuver that *intentionally* appropriates difference for the good of the group is an important first step in calling attention to systemic discrimination and marginalization. For anti-essentialists, resisting oppression on the basis of essentialized identities is tantamount to attempting to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools (Lorde, 1984). The way forward, at least at this particular moment, appears to be to continue to refine anti-essentialist theorizing and to move more deeply into the radical project of deconstructing identity categories to reveal the discursively produced relations of difference and oppression, while utilizing concepts even as they are under analysis and suspicion (Hall, 1996).

Anti-Essentialism, Identity, and Difference

In this subsection I build upon various critiques of essentialism by outlining the most salient themes in anti-essentialist literatures. First I examine two interrelated problems with essentialism: difference and binary constructions of identity. Then I move on to discuss concepts that form a counterproposal to essentialism: hybridity and its variants, and performativity. Taken together, these four themes suggest how communities that organize against racism can analytically and actively resist essentialist identity categories through the use of alternative paradigms for understanding identity. They also provide the means to act upon relations and structures of power both within and beyond the community itself.

Identity, diversity, and difference. Essentialist identity categories presume difference. Grossberg (1996) suggested that, "since the modern constitutes its own identity by differentiating itself from an-other, identity is always constituted out of otherness" (p. 93). Thus, he added, the stability of identity requires the stability of difference. And because, according to many (Bannerji, 2000; Grossberg, 1996; Hall, 1997; Joshi, 2006; Mohanty, 2003; Said, 1979), difference often entails dominance, it follows that systems of dominance require the preservation of certain orders of difference.

According to Boler and Zembylas (2003), liberal multiculturalists mask the power-laden relationships of difference under the rubric of diversity, which signals benign distinctions between people. Boler and Zembylas identified three "myths of liberal individualism" (p. 112) that obscure the oppressive nature of essentialist differences. The first myth is that we celebrate our differences because they are additive

to society, bringing colour and richness. The second myth is that none of our differences are substantive or require attention because "we are all the same underneath the skin" (p. 113). Finally, there is the myth of biology. According to this view, "Some differences are innate and, correspondingly, some fears of difference are innate" (p. 113). This means that they are natural and do not require remediation or scrutiny. However, difference, Joshi (2006) contended, is never neutral; although Hall (1997) argued that it may be ambivalent. And Said (1979) proposed that the misinterpretation of difference as a neutral signifier is a result of the absence of the preposition *from*. This, according to Said, inculcates difference with a false sense of objectivity—of essence. People or groups of people are just different, although from what or according to whose notion of what constitutes a non-normative or different identity we never know (Said, 1979). This failure to interrogate the unseen authority embedded in difference grants liberal multiculturalists permission to ignore significant issues of power embedded in constructions of an Other who is different.

To appropriate difference as a useful means of understanding and addressing destructive essentialisms, I return to Hall (1997), whom I discussed in more detail in chapter 1, whose main points are worth restating here. Drawing upon the work of Saussure, Bakhtin, Douglas, and Freud, Hall identified four ways of understanding how people come to be identified as different. Difference, he claimed, can be understood as a linguistic maneuver, the way in which people identify and engage with the other through their use of language. Two understandings of difference arise from the linguistic perspective. One says that meaning arises out of the differences between things, and the second suggests that meaning is constructed in the engagement of differences "through

dialogue" (p. 235). A third type refers to the differences between people or cultures that are used as aids in classifying and categorizing cultural traits: "Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of difference is thus the basis of that symbolic order" (p. 236). Finally, differences signify the perpetual attempt to reconcile our permanent estrangement from the other. For Hall, differences thus conceived serve as theoretical tools of analysis in examining representative practices that discursively produce identity. Hall emphasized that these are not mutually exclusive frameworks for analysis. They serve, at different levels, to reveal distinct and interlocking processes of differentiation to reveal relations of power. The types of differentiation most relevant to this study are the first and third. The first is important because it gives rise to binaries (taken up in the next section), and the third because it helps to explain the purpose and dangers of maintaining stable "symbolic boundaries" (p. 236).

Like Said (1979), Hall (1997) deconstructed racist discourses by examining the many means of their production through representative practices. Racism, racialization, sexism, and so forth are predicated on a construction of the Other as dangerous, inferior, alien, and forever opposite to us (Hall, 1997; Said, 1979). Differences are used to signal the possibility of the dangerous or contemptible in racialized discourses.

Given the power of these forms of essentializing differentiation to regulate not only social behaviour (the fear of flying with people who appear to be Arab/Muslim), but also public policy (requirements for foreign professionals to retrain), it is important to name it, deconstruct it, and lay bare the relations of power embedded in it, according to Bannerji (2000). Anti-essentialism leverages the idea of difference not to perpetrate it as

a legitimate constructor of identity, but as an act of "insubordination" (Razack, 1998, p. 158) by highlighting the "fear of difference" (Hall, 1993, p. 357) that lurks as the constant threat to ethnic or cultural absolutism. These tensions wrought by both the construction and the fear of that constructed difference manifest between and within identity categories.

Another outcome of the construction of essentialized identity differences is that they spur the formation of groups on the basis of their difference from the dominant. Bannerji (2000) maintained that these groups then "harden into identity categories" (p. 161). This hardening, although it remains defensive, contributes to the myth of the homogeneous minority Other, regardless of the fact that this common experience of being Other does not necessarily translate into a coherent, collective identity (Sewpaul, 2004).

Finally, the insidious problem of essentialism and difference can be found within homogenous minority groups themselves, where the same forms of differentiation can be replicated. The early stages of the feminist movement is one such instance in which essentialism gave rise to the understanding of difference as diversity, thereby masking relations of power and excluding *different* women from the mainstream of the movement (Anzaldua, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Butler, 1999; Elia, 2002; hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

Identity binaries. Theories about binary differences or binary opposites in representations of identity (which mean mostly the same thing) suggest that they are a problematic approach to differentiating one identity from another. A binary opposite denotes two qualities or constructed categories as the inverse of one another. Sometimes those opposites are construed as benign; however, other binaries embody complex and hierarchical relationships. Grossberg (1996) noted that the binary contains both the

dominator and the seeds of the dominator's destruction, which is the Other" (p. 90). Let us take the Occident/Orient as an example of this type of binary form. In Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism*, discussed earlier in this section, he described a binary in which the West is imbued with characteristics that situate it as perpetually superior to the East. West or Occident signifies enlightenment and scientific rationalism, whereas the East or Orient signifies the opposite or unscientific. Because scientific rationalism is privileged in this binary, it logically follows in an essentialist and binary construct that the other half of the binary, to be void of scientific rationalism, is to be deficient in all of the other qualities associated with those cultures/identities associated with the enlightenment. All kinds of extrapolations are made, such as savage, backward, and irrational, and are attributed to those who are *Oriental*. Hall (1997) drew our attention to a similar binary, the White/Black, in which White represents civilization and Black represents not-civilized. These binaries do not, as Bannerji (1995) suggested, "represent a variation on the theme human" (p. 56), but represent the *possibility* of "pollution which comes from intermarriage, racial hybridity and interbreeding" (Hall, 1997, p. 243). Boler and Zembylas (2003) added that the "restrictive binary oppositions . . . preclude the possibility of . . . ambiguous identities" (p. 122) because ambiguity defiles the certitude of the superiority of the dominant aspect of the binary. This struggle for containment and identity purity is futile, according to critics of essentialism: "Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak" (Trinh, 1989, p. 94). Therefore, if identity can never be pure, fixed, or eternally this or that—a set of characteristics and traits that can be clearly enunciated and then deployed in social and

political relations—then what is it, according to those arguing from an anti-essentialist position?

Hybridity, meztiza/o identities, and performativity. Theorizing non-essentialist identity calls for an understanding of identity that privileges complexity, fluidity, and nonhierarchy. Three particular expressions of anti-essentialism are important for this study. The first two are closely connected; they are hybridity and Mestiza/o consciousness. The third is performativity.

Hybridity appropriates the name given to the essentialist prohibition against racial mixing. This immediately places it within the rubric of the subversive, which, as Razack (1998) stated earlier in this section, is the primary function of anti-essentialism. The relationship of superior to inferior and powerful to powerless is breached, according to Bhabha (1996) in *Culture's In-Between*: "This part culture, this partial culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures—at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between" (p. 54). The theorizing of hybridity is by no means without problems; however, it provides a way to signal a process of identification (refer to chapter 1 for a description of how that term is being used here) that eludes and defies categorical imperatives. Consider the following:

> I am on an airplane flying from Miami to New York. I'm sitting next to an Ecuadorian man. He asks me where I'm from. I tell him. He asks me if I'm more Arab, Latina or American, and I state that I'm all of the above. He says, that's impossible. I must be more of one ethnicity than another. He determines that I am not really Arab, that I'm more Latina because of the camaraderie he feels in our speaking Spanish. (Alsultany, 2002, p. 107)

In this example Alsultany refused to declare herself as one thing or another and declared only the complexity, contestedness, and slipperiness of her hybridity. Note her companion's discomfort with it. This signals the discursive power of binaries to maintain

identity boundaries and to ensure that we remain inside the identity boundary while they are always and forever outside and Other.

If hybridity situates itself on the borders, slipping containment, then Mestiza/o consciousness "straddles" the borders, "healing the originary split," according to Anzaldua (2002, p. 80). Whereas the hybrid punctures the solidity of the border, the Mestiza/o creates linkages—mediating and creating allies (Anzaldua, 2002). The Mestiza/o offers her- or himself as a bridge in "an act of compassion and reconciliation" (p. 4). Returning to Alsultany (2002), she described herself as being able to "create a new cartography" in which multiple identifications take place that resist the separative colonial ideologies of "pure blood" (p. 109). The Mestiza/o is the place, the bridge between us and them; it muddies purity, thus confronting and contesting the myth of essentialism and signalling identification as *in process*—a becoming rather than a being.

Whether hybrid or mestiza/o, difference becomes a transgressive force, a force for creativity (Lorde, 1984). Hybridity and Mestiza/o consciousness appear to be radical moves to extract identity from the modern and move it into the *always present*. They are the embodiment of identification—identity as a verb. Both talk back to the authority of the modern by slithering out of its categorical grasp. It is a politics of resistance, but it does not resist by seeking legitimacy within the liberal/multicultural construct of multiple but contained and separate. It dares to "step beyond the assigned limits" (Trinh, 1989, p. 80). Hybrid and Mestiza/o identities are "future oriented labour(s) of cultural translation" (Butler, 1999, p. xviii), which reinterpret culture (gendered or raced), and, in doing so, interrupt the discursive. Hybridity and Mestiza/o consciousness arise in the liminal space of neither/nor, "between separation and re-aggregation" (Lugones, 2003,

p. 60). Neither references some sort of neoduality, but, rather, they both suggest a perspective outside the dominant prescriptive (Ladson-Billings, 2000). From the liminal space, Ladson-Billings asserted, those who claim a hybrid/Mestiza/o identification see "the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out of the mainstream" (p. 263).

Performativity in Butler's (1999) terms involves labour to produce identity/ies. Butler conceptualized identity as action, which recalls Hall's (1996) use of identification as the linguistic means by which to speak of how people understand themselves to be in this world. Although others (Bannerji, 1995; Bhabha, 1994; Frost, 2005; Hall, 1996, 1997) took up Butler's notion of performativity to theorize about other identity categories, Butler was particularly interested in gender. Gender, she says, is a "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 179) through which the subject performs either with or against the grain of regulatory framework (itself discursively produced) for that identity category. Butler distinguished performance from expression by relating the latter to the existence of an "inner essence" (p. 180). Performative acts or signifiers situate and resituate the self within the identity matrix. Performativity suggests one pathway to agency because "agency . . . is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (p. 185).

Although Butler (1999) used drag as an analytic departure to deconstruct performative identification, there is a potentially interesting parallel between drag and the spectacle of the multicultural festival. In this act of signification the performers dress and act out their racialized or culturalized identities, often supplementing dance and song

with food, to invoke and evoke the essential qualities that purportedly lurk within all members of the community, but which, in reality, do not correspond to any actual person or persons.

Some have extrapolated from Butler's (1999) use of performativity to transgress gender binaries to theorize agency for racialized identities (Bhabha, 1994; Frost, 2005; Hall, 1996). For example, Frost described the *performance* of ethnicity as the utilization of "actions and ways of being in the world" (p. 200) that are used to signal belonging as well as transgression. Bhabha construed performativity as creation of the "future as becoming once again open [for] marginalized or minority identities" (p. 314). Both Frost's and Bhabha's work suggested that hybrid or Mestiza/o identities are performative identifications. The value of these modes of identification lies within their power to transgress binaries and dismantle essentialisms that arise from them.

Non-essentialist Identity and the Agentic Self

The self is "the active while acted upon agent[s] without whom history would be simply reduced to a self-reproducing Hegelian category" (Bannerji, 1995, p. 82). According to Michael (2003):

> Identity emerges not as the organic expression of preexisting traditions and timeless belief (as if there were any such thing anywhere), but as a reactive formation to challenges and assaults perceived as external to the self and the group in question. (p. 712)

From the statements of both Bannerji and Michael I understand the self to be discursively produced; however, I also understand that the self has a performative capacity that can be leveraged to interrupt oppressive, reificatory discourses (Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1999; Hall, 1996). Performing a counter hegemonic identity can include acts of speaking, writing, behaving, dressing, and all manner of political action (Bannerji, 1995, 2000;

Hall, 1997; Mohanty, 2003). Alsultany's (2002) refusal to choose a particular category of identity with which to identify is an example of performing identity as antisubordination (Razack, 1998).

Without retreating into essentialism or re-centering the subject, how can identity and the self be referred to and understood in a way that is both useful and continues to resist homogeneity and challenge discourses that circumscribe identities and reproduce the aforementioned assaults? Understanding the always hybrid, always mestiza/o, and always trans nature of identities is a critical move in utilizing identity as a concept for organizing against identity-based oppression. Because oppression has been reproduced through essentialized and binarized identities, it cannot, as Lorde (1984) pointed out, be dismantled on the basis of those same constructs. These acts of performing identity interrupt rigid categories and subvert taboos about the mixing of identities and the blurring of categories of separation. Beyond the categories and between the binary opposites await the possibilities for multiple, complex, and even conflicting forms of identification within categories and outside of binaries. Identification has the potential to deconstruct the subject-object binary because an individual may at once identify with conflicting subject positions. The subject-object binary has been identified by some theorists as the foundation for structures of oppression and domination (Anzaldua, 1987; Butler, 1999; Hall, 1996; hooks, 2000).

Identification refers to the process of identifying in the moment; in this context, with a particular characteristic or set of characteristics. The self is always moving towards and moving away from other objects of identification. Conceptualizing identity as identification (Hall, 1996) also presents a way to express and articulate characteristics

held in common with others, which can form the basis for collective action that does not privilege commonality over difference. Identification takes into account the construction of identity in and through difference and acknowledges that some forms of differentiation are power laden and oppressive.

Anti-essentialism does not, then, preclude collectivity or radical and resistant politics against racism. Indeed, anti-essentialist identity theory constitutes a radical politics of resistance in naming the identity constructs and tracing the relations of power that masquerade as the norm.

Anti-Essentialism and Group Identities

In this section I review the literature to surface theorizing on non-essentialist collective or community identities. What does an anti-essentialist collective look like? Upon what will it build coherence? What implications might this have for racialized communities, such as the Muslim community, who are attempting to address and resist racism? These are the questions that I will explore in this section.

Although a rich body of literature addresses collective identity through lenses of culture, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and so forth, much of it lies beyond the scope and interest of this study. In this study I am interested in how an already existing coalition based on an essentialized categorical identity understands and does or does not make sense of the subject positions present within it. Therefore I draw upon Bannerji (2000), Mohanty (2003), and hooks (2000) to address the question, how might groups identified as marginalized, oppressed, minority, or racialized construe themselves as a group or community without resorting to essentializing practices? Bannerji addressed this question from the point of view of minorities of colour, whereas Mohanty and hooks

employed a gender analysis. I begin with a review of their critiques of the unproblematized community and then move on to a discussion of non-essentializing principles that can be used to conceptualize a collective identity. I use the words *collective identity* and *community* interchangeably to refer to people who are often grouped as a category on the basis of a particular identity such as gender, race, or religion.

The nonessential community. A fundamental problem with essentialized collective identities is that, like any essentialism, they are premised on the existence of what Mohanty (2003) referred to as "natural/psychological commonality" (p. 116). That is, it presumes *a* community or *the* community that is naturally bound together and bounded by shared identity essentialisms that might be metaphysical, biological, linguistic, and/or methodological (Stone, 2004). Bannerji (2000) questioned the "practice of considering 'community' as a self-contained and natural formation, a social given" (p. 154). This resonates with Mohanty's criticism of the community of universal sisterhood, which is posited upon an argument that women qua women share an experience of oppression on that basis and thus constitute a natural community. In both cases they challenge the naturalness as well as the implied homogeneity of the collective essentialisms called community. If communities do not spontaneously or naturally occur, then what are the forces that shape their formation?

Mohanty (2003), Bannerji (2000), and hooks (2000) understood community to be produced through various social and political forces. Indeed, Bannerji contended, "we need to remember that it [the community] is a political and cultural ideological formation, reliant upon social relations, which are the basis of social life and not a spontaneous or

natural association of people" (p. 154). Both Bannerji and Mohanty pointed out that heterogeneity within a community is evidence that with communities there is much that is not held in common. Communities are formed "through a combination of internal and external factors" (p. 154) and "on the grounds of difference and commonness" (p. 154). In the case of minority identities of colour who experience marginalization and exclusion on the basis of their skin colour, cultural or religious practices, or some phenotypical feature held in common, they may come together in what Bannerji called a "defensive move" (p. 155). The same was initially true of feminism, which based its notion of sisterhood, a shared collective identity, on the supposition that all women were oppressed by patriarchy in the same way and to the same degree.

The critique of imposed or artificial homogeneity is that it necessitates the obscuring or even negating of social and political relations of power and their effects on members of the community. It is in the identification and analysis of and the action upon relations of power and their effects that common cause is found. In the case of the community of "universal sisterhood" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 110), Mohanty suggested that the presumption of a universal sisterhood obscures how women experience being women and that it is their locatedness that "traces[s] an analytic and political space" (p. 122) that gives rise to common action and common cause. This echoes hooks' (2000) earlier critiques of American feminism, particularly during its early stages in which she criticized organizing on the basis of common oppression, which she argued, "provide[s] the excuse many privileged women needed to ignore the differences between their social status and the status of masses of women" (p. 6). Without an analysis of relations of

power, it is difficult to surface inequities within the community, which results in further marginalization of already marginalized community members.

For communities to begin working towards acknowledging their contingency and constructedness, they must first resist attempts to achieve or create identity coherence. It is not surprising, Bannerji (2000) observed, that within the "community of the excluded" (p. 158) internal differences are suppressed and homogeneity is privileged as a defensive manoeuvre. "Silence . . . regarding class, gender, and other power relations" (p. 158) is part of the community's attempts to reinforce if not strengthen the identity and cohesion of the community. This type of homogeneity is a trap, according to Mohanty (2003), because it results in the abandonment of resistance for boundary maintenance. When it is premised on the illusion of sameness or shared oppression, communities tend to promote the "ossification of difference" (p. 117), which in turn silences or erases the experiences of the most vulnerable within the community.

Using the issue of violence against women as a point of departure, Bannerji (2000) described how social and political forces such as racism and immigration policies construct immigrant communities, which use their essentialized identity borders as a defence and protection. Now marked as both different and separate from the mainstream "hegemonic group," minority communities perceive cohesion and commonality as integral to their identity and safety. Silence, under these conditions, according to Bannerji, constitutes a "voluntary aspect of community making" (p. 155). The essentialized and unproblematized community, when it is viewed as naturally occurring and benign or as indisputably positive, has at least three problematic outcomes. Through maintaining the illusion of homogeneity, it serves to perpetuate the dominant/minority

binary. Second, it fails to consider the multiple forms of oppression that act upon various members of the community. And, finally, it fails to consider how multiple forms of oppression are "creating differences among themselves" (p. 157). The task of recognizing and addressing relations of power *within* groups is often perceived as dangerous and as threatening to disrupt the perception and representation of homogeneity, which has become conflated with strength and coherence.

For a community to become a site of analysis of and resistance to oppression, it must recognize that holding a particular identity does not necessarily entail being, for example, antiracist or feminist. Experience requires analysis if it is to inform resistance work (Mohanty, 2003). hooks (2000) and Butler (1999) both wrote about the feminist movement privileging certain subjective experiences of the feminine by assuming that all women, by virtue of being women, both were feminist and shared the same experience of oppression on that basis. This fallacious assumption, according to hooks, had the effect of "disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality" (p. 44). Similarly, Bannerji (2000) saw communities as reinforcing oppressive boundaries and binaries by "suppressing internal sources of division and seek[ing] to present themselves, at least in their representational endeavours, as seamless realities" (p. 155). This suppression is often counterproductive because it has the effect of reinforcing the modern-traditional binary and the reductive and essentialist identity constructs that attend it.

Binaries, especially those that embed notions of superior and inferior, constitute acts of domination by perpetuating hierarchies and structuring social relations. For communities to engage in resistance and further their antiracist or feminist projects, it is

important that they acknowledge that "they are contested grounds of socio-cultural definitions and political agencies" (p. 159). This does not entail eschewing common ground or common cause, nor does it dismiss the value of seeking out those who share common ground on the basis of identity. It does entail the development of analyses that consider the relations and structures of power that shape minority or marginalized communities and which valorize the contingent and contested nature of the community itself. The subversive and resistant act arises, according to both Bannerji (2000) and Razack (1998), when the collective transgresses the binary, by desisting in "recolonization," and refusing to "internalize colonial values" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 163) of moribund relations of power.

In this section I reviewed selected literature to examine anti-essentialism and its impact on community identity. I discussed key critiques of anti-essentialism, the most important of which relates to those identity groups who are invisible and who seek protection under the law from racism and discrimination. I used identity as identification and agency through performativity as two ways to address critiques of anti-essentialism. Bannerji (2000) and Mohanty (2003) laid the theoretical groundwork for non-essentialist community organizing and pointed to the reconceptualization of "communities of resistance" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 47) as imagined communities that premise their existence and action upon oppressive relations of power rather than a priori and essentialist identities.

Coalitions, Identities, and Difference

> I think we need a solution to the problem of walking from one of one's groups to another, being mistreated, misunderstood, engaging in self-abuse and self-betrayal for the sake of the group that only distorts our needs because they erase our complexity. (Lugones, 2003, p. 139)

Lugones' and others' calls for coalitional organizing across difference comprise one way of theorizing and understanding collective responses to oppression. There is a vast range of literatures that approach collective activism through other lenses. One example of this is social movement theory. Within social movement theorizing, resource mobilization theory focuses on the collective marshalling of existing resources and networks, which usually fails to take into account "the complexity of organizations and groups" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 3). Alternatively, new social movement theories concentrate on identity politics, which necessitates a more essentialist understanding of identity. In contrast to social movement theories, coalitional theories have a very intentional emphasis on working from a non-essentialist understanding of identity and a corollary focus on consciously interrogating and negotiating multiple identity differences and fluidities. This approach to theorizing collective action is most congruent with the framework and intent of the study.

There are many types of coalitions, and not all are concerned with dismantling oppressive structures or "relations of ruling" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 11). Coalitions may be conservative, reactionary, liberal, or radical (Burack, 2001; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Quintero, 2001). Bystydzienski and Schacht as well as Quintero used the term *radical coalitions* to describe coalitions that seek full participation within the coalition. This is accomplished through acknowledging and dismantling privileges associated with particular identity categories, which also entails an analysis of identity essentialisms. This is consistent with others' understandings of coalitional processes and objectives as focusing on both internal processes of confronting the effects of discursively produced identities and differences (Butler, 1999; Lugones, 2003;

Mohanty, 2003; Reagon, 2000). This is not to say that coalitions are solely preoccupied with internal relations, because, of course, coalitions come into existence to effect a change in society. However, many theorists have emphasized that a distinguishing feature of coalitions is that they do not privilege strategic planning and activism over internal relations of power.

In this section I examine the literature, both theoretical and empirical, to connect anti-essentialist identity theories with coalitional theorizing and to answer the question, How will groups form and build cohesion in the absence of stable, unitary identities and reified identity categories? In particular, I examine the theoretical work of Butler (1999), Burack (2001), Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001), Lugones (2003), and Reagon (2000) and studies conducted by Luibheid and Khokha (2001), Lyons (2001), and Quintero (2001). Major themes within this section include coalitions and difference, coalitions, solidarity and cohesion, and implications for coalitions of Muslim activists.

Coalitions and Difference

Radical coalitions take up the anti-essentialist project of engaging with identity difference by tracing their discursive production and dismantling relations of power that are embedded in essentialist understandings of identity and difference. Indeed, a foundational assumption of coalitions, according to Butler (1999), ought to be the "essential incompleteness" of any identity category that "permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings" (p. 21). The "politics of identity" and, consequently, the politics of difference are as relevant to internal coalitional processes as they are to their activities in the broader social and political arena (Mohanty, 2003, p. 107).

In her oft-cited essay *Coalition Politics: Turning the Century*, Reagon (2000) used the metaphor of the "barred room" (p. 345) to refer to the contrived and essentialist spaces that have served to incubate identity politics. Reagon did not dismiss these homogeneous spaces out of hand, but suggested that they serve a limited purpose. Short periods of time spent in the barred room might serve to nurture the coming-to-voice of an oppressed group or provide a space in which to rest from the rigors of coalitional work. However, the barred room holds danger as well as respite, for it can deteriorate into a xenophobic and exclusionary space. According to Reagon, the real work of bringing an end to oppressions is done in coalition. Coalitions are, by definition, according to Reagon, complex, heterogeneous, and even dangerous spaces.

Although some, according to Burack (2001), are pessimistic about the possibility of human beings' capacity to transcend the "irrepressible nature of human longing for groups and affiliations" that deteriorates into the barred room, she suggested that Black feminists offer a less hopeless future for coalitional work (p. 42). Given the "ubiquity of difference and the necessity of work across differences" (p. 41), Burack said that what is required is ongoing empirical research and theorizing about the "emotional work" of confronting individually and collectively held essentialisms including those that perpetuate hierarchical binaries. In other words, coalitions take into consideration the need to account for and engage with the differences that exist. That they are discursively produced necessitates attention to the means of their production as well as their implications. Mohanty (2003) added that coalition work requires the dismantling of binaries, which contributes to Bystydzienski and Schacht's (2001) observation that privilege within the coalition must be acknowledged and relinquished.

Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) identified three stages in which the work of negotiating difference among coalition members occurs. Initially, "there is a recognition and acknowledgement of individuals' experiential differences and identities that result from societal categorizations" (p. 9). Next, there is "an honest appraisal of how privilege . . . is played out" in the coalition (p. 10) as a result of identities and differences. After these negotiations of difference, the coalition is prepared to "find common ground by accepting and honoring those perspectives, experiences, and insights that are shared between them" (p. 10). Burack (2001), Bystydzienski and Schacht, and Reagon (2000) described this as emotional and even, according to Reagon, dangerous work. Lyons (2001) described the emotional aspect of the work in a study of a Singaporean women's coalition in which the women struggled with their own biases to move from tolerance to respect for one another.

The work of engaging with difference is relational and communicative. Both Butler (1999) and Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) used the term *dialogic* to refer to the way in which shared meaning is constructed through engagement with difference and the implications for relations of power. By *dialogue*, they referred to the creation of a communicative space in which no one voice or perspective is privileged and where the group makes meaning out of what emerges in the dialogue.

Given the degree to which the work of engaging with difference is both difficult and potentially emotional, some have reasoned that particular leadership skills are necessary to steward the process, at least initially (Lyons, 2001). Quintero (2001) advised that "leaders . . . must be skilled in mediating differences, competent in identifying tensions rooted in oppressive perspectives, comfortable in naming them and capable of

encouraging members to address them" (p. 102). Therefore coalitional leadership must have carefully thought through issues of identity, difference, and power to maintain the clarity that Quintero prescribed. Lyons echoed the need for leaders to attend to difference, especially those who marginalize some coalition members. Leaders also have a responsibility to ensure that everyone can access the dialogic space.

Coalitions, Solidarity, and Cohesion

Traditional notions of solidarity often refer to what Burack (2001) described as "internal homogeneity" (p. 43), in which the price of belonging is conformity. Lugones (2003) wrote extensively about unity as a form of "enforced purity" (p. 127). In the previous section I reviewed literature that claimed that difference is given equal prominence to notions of unity or cohesion. Does this mean that sameness is unnecessary for solidarity or unity? If unity and cohesion are not based on sharing a homogeneous identity category, then upon what basis is the coalition held together? What threatens or supports coalitional cohesion?

Butler (1999), Mohanty (2003), and Lugones (2003) offered three slightly different views of coalitions as open, fluid, and emergent and which they suggested not only are integral to coalitions, but also facilitate an alternative foundation for cohesion through the collective commitment to democratic engagement. Butler contended that the contested and even contradictory understandings of identity, difference, and the struggle for social justice do not preclude collective action. She suspected that the call for unity often "rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity" (p. 21), thus pre-empting the radical work of coalitions, which is, in part, to challenge representations of identities that are oppressive and exclusive. In a similar vein,

Mohanty eschewed the notion of a universal identity; in particular, she challenged the notion of a universal feminine. There is no need, she stated, to valorize a particular identity for mobilization or agency. Lugones also called for a deep coalition in which multiplicity becomes the basis for shared understanding and resistance to multiple and interlocking oppressions. For Lugones, calls for unity echo calls for racial or ethnic purity or authenticity, which degenerates into orthodoxy and rigidity (p. 161). Lugones saw multiplicity as the defining characteristic of both coalition members and coalitions themselves. Multiplicity is the simultaneous co-extant facets of the self and is sometimes known as mestiza/o consciousness. Multiplicity resists purity, homogeneity, and fragmentation. Transcendent unity and "the multiple-mestizo . . . each have their histories, are in contestation in significant logical tension" (p. 127). These tensions play out in collectives, like coalitions, where multiplicity is the organizing logic, yet the pull to unity runs like a current through the complex and contested identities that populate it (Lugones, 2003). This pull to orthodoxy or unity, she claimed, is understandable; and like Reagon (2000), she allowed that it offers the illusion of safety, which makes it "hard to see the dangers of orthodoxy and conservatism from within and under siege" (p. 161).

Butler (1999), Mohanty (2003), and Lugones (2003) described coalitional ideals that are richly populated with complex identities in creative engagement with social issues. Homogeneity does not factor into their accounting of successful coalitional work. However, in the absence of a need for a priori identity sameness, what is the basis upon which radical coalitions engender enough cohesion with which to do resistance work?

Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001) suggested that a search for and the development of common values, goals, principles, and experiences provide the basis for collective commitment to the coalition, which includes developing a shared analysis of the problem. By developing commonality along these multiple axes, the coalition actually has many points of cohesion. Lyons (2001) proposed that "strong organizational and ethical principles" (p. 178) contribute to the success of coalitions, which Reagon (2000) echoed. Luibheid and Khokha (2001) suggested that, in fact, the linking of multiple oppressions within the coalitional framework, as Lugones (2003) recognized as well, makes coalitions more viable because they are not predicated on single issues, nor do they preclude a broader base of support.

hooks (2000) argued that doing the work of engaging with identity differences, referred to earlier in this section, also constitutes the development of solidarity, for it has the possibility of engendering the collective repudiation of oppression (p. 60). hooks was referring in particular to class privilege, but this could be extended to gender, colour, or sexual privilege as well. Quintero (2001) described this process in her study of HIV/AIDS coalition work, in which she reported having to confront her own privilege of being HIV negative and working alongside people living with the illness while continuing to work in an authentic way within the coalition.

The collective struggle to recognize the presence of multiple oppressions and analyze them constitutes one means of developing nonexclusive forms of cohesion and solidarity within the coalitional space. Theorizing radical coalitions and their possibilities is an emergent field, and many of the authors referred to in this section have called for more work, both theoretical and empirical in this area.

Coalitional Failure

Not all coalitions are successful, nor are they all longstanding. Among the many reasons that coalitions might fail, the three presented here are particularly relevant, related as they are to issues of identity and difference. Although presented as distinct threats to coalitional work, they are really various manifestations of identity essentialisms and represent attempts at imposing a homogeneous identity and the privileging of one form of oppression over another.

Luibheid and Khokha's (2001) study of attempts to create an "alliance . . . between immigrant rights and queer movements" (p. 6) illustrates that a failure to engage in an analysis that reveals the intersection of oppressions can result in a retreat to identity politics. Their findings brought to light "a lack of informed understanding about . . . queer immigrants as well as the presence of anti-immigrant sentiments held by some members of the lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgendered communities" (p. 83). This lack of understanding precluded their coming to an understanding of their complex identities as sites of multiple and sometimes intersecting oppressions.

Without an understanding of the interconnectedness of forms of oppression, it is possible, according to Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001), to ignore "the hierarchical privileging of the agendas of some over others" (p. 12). The ranking of agendas (and implicitly, then, the ranking of oppressions) contributes to the marginalization of some and potentially the fragmentation of the coalition. This is connected to the third type of failure, which is yielding to the pull of homogeneity. Burack (2001) cautioned that this will result in efforts to "police the porous boundaries between themselves and other

groups," which in turn helps to "sustain a group's fantasies about the difference of the 'other'" (p. 43).

Coalitional failure cannot be reduced to these three issues; however, they point to the need for coalitions to attend to the development of the internal process reviewed earlier in this section. Attending to the relational and identity work of coalitions may be time and energy consuming, but this work will help to inoculate the coalition against wholesale collapse (Burack, 2001; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Lugones, 2003; Luibheid & Khokha, 2001; Lyons, 2001; Mohanty, 2003; Reagon, 2000).

Coalitional Organizing and the Muslim Community

I draw upon the foregoing analyses to inform and critique the assumption of the naturalness of a Muslim *Ummah*. Malik claimed that *Ummah* "evokes a 'we' feeling among Muslims" (p. 71) and a solidarity that is evidenced whenever Muslims in the West gather for social or political reasons, although as I argued in chapter 1 it appears to be more imaginary and constructed than actual. The category *Ummah* then becomes analogous to global feminism or antiracism movements that predicate their actions on the existence of a natural community, in this case upon those whose experience of themselves as Muslims forms the basis for the community of resistance. What the notion of *Ummah* fails to take into account is the confluence of multiple forms of oppression within the Muslim community, as explicated in the preceding paragraphs. The presumption of unity on the basis of a categorical identity harkens back to Lugones' (2003) linking of unity to purity, which calls for the coalition's regulation and authentication of its membership on the basis of a hegemonic understanding of *Muslim*.

The first section of this chapter detailed the realities of a Muslim community under, as Bannerji (2000) expressed it, siege. However, Lugones (2003), Reagon (2000), Mohanty (2003), and Butler (1999) also argued that oppression will not be overcome from the barred room, but through the efforts of radical coalitions who recognize that "there is no simple monolithic solution to racism, to sexism, to homophobia" (Lorde, 1984, p. 136). What is required is a vision of these and other forms of oppression not as parallel conditions, but as various manifestations of relations of oppression predicated upon essentialism and its binaries. This body of literature suggests that coalitional organizing holds great promise for communities in which complex and intersecting identities and oppressions require expression and redress.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed various literatures, theoretical and empirical, that detail the way in which Muslims continue to experience identity-based oppression. I traced the history of this oppression from Orientalism to contemporary Islamophobia and concluded with a brief overview of the types of stereotypes that are used to reduce and essentialize Muslims in the West.

In the second section of this chapter I focused on identity to broaden the discussion and situate the contemporary Muslim experience within current theorizing on identity. Included in the review was a summary of what is meant by essentialism, arguments against an essentialist understanding of identity (anti-essentialism), and current critiques of anti-essentialism. Threaded throughout the section was a discussion on how identity differences are produced, understood, and engaged with. I concluded the

section with a discussion of a non-essentialist understanding of identity as presented in selected literature.

I concluded this chapter with a review of the literature outlining how coalitions are currently theorized, particularly radical coalitions that emphasize a nonessential understanding of identity, and the importance of organizing across difference. Radical coalitions do not bracket difference, but use it to engage in an analysis of multiple forms of oppression, how they are constructed, and who they privilege.

Taken together, these three sections provide the theoretical foundation for this study of one racialized community coalition and its struggle to resist Islamophobia.

CHAPTER 3:

MULTIPLICITY AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

> In the social sciences today there is no longer a God's-eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. . . . There seems to be an emerging consensus that all inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer, that observation is theory laden. . . . We can no longer think of ourselves as neutral spectators of the social world. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 420)

This description of qualitative research is both liberating and sobering. It liberates the researcher from the onerous and impossible task of coming to a conclusive and permanent truth. So liberated, she or he is free to interpret, seek to understand, or deconstruct. The sobering part of this type of research is the researcher's responsibility to be continuously conscious, through reflexive and representative practices, about declaring standpoints and bias. If all observation is theory laden, then it is the responsibility of the researcher to disclose those theories that mediate representations of the research.

As a new researcher I found the task of deciding on a research framework to be one of the most challenging aspects of the journey. Paradigmatic boundaries are not always clearly marked or universally agreed upon; neither are their characteristics always understood in the same way by differing scholars. Yet, in light of Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) emphasis on the standpoint of the inquirer, it seems especially important to cut the methodological cloth to suit the particular contours of the study.

This study takes place within a community that, while reeling from the negative impact of geopolitics, is perceived by a great deal of the Western world as hostile,

violent, resistant to reflection, and without nuance. In this discursive environment the community, feeling increasingly isolated, has paradoxically circled its wagons, so to speak, as a means of self-protection. Spurred by Bannerji's (2000) compelling arguments for racialized and immigrant communities to resist the temptation to perpetuate the essentialist illusion of homogeneity and a-historicity, I view this study as an opportunity to explore the extent to which that impulse exists or is resisted in a community with which I closely identify and how this impacts the collective efforts to resist racialization and its effects.

This chapter contains several sections. In the first section I present my rationale for the framework I used to guide the research. Next, I describe the Coalition in which the research took place. In the third section I explore some of the challenges that I faced in doing insider research. The fourth section details the methods that I used to collect the data, which included the process of collecting, analyzing, and representing the research. I discuss issues of validity within a postpositivist paradigm in the fifth section and conclude with a section on ethical issues.

Methodological Struggles

The purpose of this research was to "illuminate the lived experience of progressive social groups … [and] also be illuminated by their struggles" (Lather, 1991, p. 55). *Illuminate* means "to light up" or "help to explain" or "enlighten spiritually or intellectually" (Pearsall & Trumble, 1996, p. 704). The struggle in the case of this study was that of a racialized coalition that has formed across significant identity differences to resist discrimination and marginalization within Canada. As in many other racialized communities, the struggles are manifold. There is the struggle for place and voice within

the dominant society; there is the struggle to build collectivity to achieve this place and voice; and there is the internal struggle between the desire for unity and the multiple issues that arise within the Coalition out of the various subject positions.

The question that plagued me during my reflections was, how do I illuminate these complexities? I addressed the question by identifying the study's purpose. The primary purpose of this study was to *understand*; therefore, it has an interpretative quality. Within an interpretive framework, according to Mertens (1998), "the researcher's goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (p. 11). What I sought to understand and to make understood to others in the Coalition (and beyond) was how members of this particular racialized coalition understand identity and difference both as concepts and at the level of the particular.

Complicating the interpretive goals of the research was the emancipatory quality associated with doing research with/in a racialized community (this study). According to Lather (1991) one of the purposes of emancipatory research is to empower. Lather's use of empowerment includes "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (p. 4). According to Mertens (1998), emancipatory research grew out of a reaction to the privileging of dominant points of view. Women, racialized groups, sexual minorities, and Indigenous peoples began to develop alternative methods and paradigms for doing research. This study is consistent with an emancipatory framework on two accounts. First, I sought to surface issues related to potentially oppressive forms of differentiation. Second, it was certainly my intention to surface both

the collectively unprivileged voice of Muslims in Canada. Therefore, this study also has an emancipatory quality to it.

Finally, it is important to note that the theoretical framework that guided the study is grounded in identity theories, which compelled me to reference a world of ideas that eschew totalizing truths arising out of the rational narrative of the enlightenment. Lincoln & Denzin (2000) provided a way out of my dilemma of how to accommodate this methodologically: "It is not that we might elect to engage in work that is postmodern. Rather, it is that we have inherited a postmodern world, and there is no going back" (p. 1059).

I was not searching for a universal explication; this was an exploratory study. Therefore its interpretive/emancipatory success resided in its capacity to allow various perspectives to be considered that heretofore had been occluded. I hoped that those voices would contribute to an understanding of the complexity of the Muslim community and its struggle to work within a coalitional framework to address social and political issues that impact the community as a whole. I hoped too that this research would serve as a catalyst for the continued sharing of perspectives that resist reificatory modes of organizing and categorizing, both within the community and on the part of the dominant community towards those who identify as Muslims.

The Coalition

Choosing the Site

In choosing a site for researching coalition dynamics, I was drawn to work with a community that speaks to my identification as a Muslim. Elsewhere in this thesis I speak at length about that relationship, but I believe that it is important to restate that both

academic curiosity and activism in the community contributed to my decision. There were two possible sites for the research. I contacted the chairperson of one organization and the executive director of another to set up preliminary meetings during which I outlined my proposed research focus and methods. I was invited to make a presentation to the board of directors for site 1 (the Coalition) and a member of the advisory board for site 2. I made the presentation to the Coalition during one of its regular monthly meetings, which are fairly formal in nature, though not unfriendly. I was given five minutes to present. I described the purpose, nature, proposed methods, and ethical protections of the research and asked those present for their permission to contact them by e-mail regarding the possibility of an interview. I received permission (a) to gain access to the Coalition's e-mail addresses and (b) to contact people to request an interview.

My meeting at site 2 was less formal, and the executive director and board member were very supportive. However, after learning more about the organization, I realized that it was so different from the Coalition that any comparison would have been superficial. Also, site 2 was less coherent and not strictly speaking an organization of and for Muslims. I suspected that having access to research participants and documents would have been much more problematic.

Once site 1 had granted me permission to do the research, I withdrew my request for access to site 2, taking care to avoid harming my relationship with the executive director.

The Coalition's Goals and Structure

I briefly sketched out the Coalition's origins and purpose in chapter 1. To expand on that, I present its structure, objectives, and vision in this section to more fully situate the study. The Coalition's vision statement is "to work with the Muslim communities in Edmonton to help improve the lives of Muslims in the region and to enhance their contribution to society at large" (02 DOC, p. 2); and its mission is to "strive to speak and act on behalf of Edmonton Muslims with fellow Canadians in a manner that protects, promotes, and enhances the understanding of Islam and Muslims in matters of public policy, education, peace and safety" (ibid. p. 2).

Constructed as a coalition of Muslim organizations, the Coalition had nine member organizations at the time of this writing. Each organization sends two representatives to sit on a body that is referred to as the *council*. The eighteen members of the council elect nine from amongst themselves to the executive committee, which is responsible for choosing from among themselves a chair, vice-chair, and a secretary-treasurer and communications officer. Membership is available to

> any registered not-for-profit entity that professes belief in Allah[3] [God] (SWT)[4] and testifies that Muhammad (PBUH)[5] is His final prophet, and fully subscribes to the mission, values and operating principles of the Council contained in this document, shall, upon application and unanimous acceptance by the Council, be eligible to the membership of the Council. (02 DOC, p. 7)

The Coalition has five portfolios that oversee its activities: public policy, education, interfaith, special events, and strategic leadership. Formed in the wake of

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[3] *Allah* is the Arabic word for God. It is the God of Abraham and Jesus Christ.
[4] *SWT* means "Glorious and exalted is God."
[5] *PUBH* means "Peace and blessings of God be upon him."

September 11, 2001, the Coalition has attempted to maintain a proactive stance rather than simply reacting to conditions in the community. For example, through the auspices of the education portfolio, Coalition members worked with the university to establish a chair in Islamic Studies:

> We are very proud of the fact that our committee has been successful in establishing the first Islamic Chair at a major university in Canada This unprecedented achievement is currently being emulated in other North American cities. The Education Portfolio will identify funding sources and organize fundraising events to support the Islamic Chair. (26 DOC, ¶ 2)[6]

The foci of the public policy portfolio included preparing and disseminating policy representations, legislative monitoring, and participation in boards and committee open to members of the public. In particular the Coalition concentrates on civil liberties, foreign policy, citizenship and immigration, and inclusiveness. It is also working to ensure that discriminatory or stereotypical representations of Muslims in public school materials are addressed.

The Coalition responds to requests for information about Islam and the Muslim community in Edmonton and Canada from a variety of individuals and organizations. It has produced two editions of an information booklet entitled *Towards Understanding Muslims in Canada* (05 DOC, 2005), which has been used by, among others, the local police service.

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[6] Although this is a public document, direct reference to it could compromise the confidentiality of the research participants.

The View From Inside

I was a member of this coalition from the time of its first visioning workshop until it was about one year old. I know many of its leaders through blood relations, friendship, the mosque that I attended as a child, or various community activities. My paternal grandparents were founding members of the first Canadian mosque built in Edmonton. My family has a long and respected history in the community. Thus it would appear that my status as an insider is unequivocal. However, my status as an insider is much more complex and even contested. Certain of my identities do not necessarily privilege me in the context of the Muslim community or within all Muslim organizations. Some would not consider me religious enough; others might believe that my feminist stance on certain issues renders me suspect. And although I have experienced the sting of being a racialized Other since childhood, many in my community regard me as fully integrated or even assimilated into Canadian society.

Insider status is often contested and not always a guarantee of unproblematic relations with research participants; nor do members of the community under study necessarily interpret the insider view as necessitating a privileged view of the community (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Merriam et al., 2001; Sherif, 2001). On the point of relations with the community, unproblematized notions of insider presume a "monolithic entity" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). However, gender, education, skin colour, and place of residence can all contribute to or detract from the research relationship. Merriam et al. referred to this as *positionality*: "Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (p. 411). Both Beoku-Betts and Sherif described their experiences in the field having to negotiate perceived identity differences even though they were

initially welcomed as insiders. Regarding the insider-researchers capacity to render a more complete and accurate picture of the community, rather than affording the researcher with insider-status privilege, "insiders have been accused of being inherently biased, and too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions" (p. 411).

Merriam et al. (2001) also raised important issues for insider researchers regarding the representation of findings. Claims to truth within constructivist and postmodern notions of the truth are considered to be constructed, impossible to claim, or multiple. Regardless of the epistemological standpoint of the researcher, any claims to truth, be they contingent or universal can be construed as constituting an imposition upon the community or research participants. Being an insider does not confer any privilege in this regard. It is my perception that others in my community may interpret my belief in multiple contested truths as false and problematic. On the other hand, there will be those within the organization and the community who will appreciate a perspective of multiple truths. I think that this whole situation has serious and important implications for ensuring validity. However, Lather (1991) reassured the insider concerned about face validity it is not the only point of validation for the qualitative researcher, insider or not. This is explored more fully later in this chapter.

Still, I have had to struggle against what Bolak (1996) called "being blinded by the familiar" (p. 109). I have had years to think about the issues that I address in this research, and I have had to work against the tendency to make assumptions about what I would discover in the field. I had to be willing to be surprised and contradicted by the findings. This was not an aspect of doing insider research to which I confess I had given

much consideration, believing that it would be easy to transcend my biases. But, of course, biases are not something to be transcended; they *are* who I *am*. The best that I could do in this regard was to be sensitive to my defensive or resistant feelings, which apparently are not uncommon in these contexts (Bolak, 1996; Sherif, 2001).

Although the challenges that confront the 'insider' researcher are many, there are also benefits and rewards. In spite of my outspokenness, I was granted complete access to the organization and was able to secure the interviews that I needed with relative ease. I believe that people were relatively honest and trusted me not to misrepresent them or our community. Furthermore, it is rewarding to be able to contribute this research for what I hope will be to the benefit of a community that has meaning for me.

These aspects of conducting research—my identification with the community and my former membership in this coalition—influenced every facet of the research, from the development of the questions to the writing of the final thesis. That it complicated and rendered the process more complex is indisputable. Whether it made a positive difference is still hard for me to determine. I will take this up further in the section on validity.

Conducting the Research

I used three methods for the collection of the data, all of which are compatible with qualitative research in general and with interpretive and emancipatory perspectives in particular. Fontana and Frey (2000) described interviewing as "one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (p. 645). Because my study is based on what people think about identity and difference, I chose the interview as the primary method of data collection. This is congruent with Marshall and Rossman's (1995) suggestion that it is appropriate for interviews to constitute the primary

collection method "if the purpose of the study is to uncover and describe the participants' perspectives on events; that is, that the subjective view is what matters" (p. 81). This is precisely what I was attempting to understand and discuss in this study.

Over a period of six months I interviewed 10 members of the Coalition. Supplementing the interviews were 6 observational opportunities over a one-year period. I also analyzed a number of documents, including internal documents as well as those used for publicity or for public education. The various modes of collection took place over a period of one year. During that time I collected and analyzed the documents as they were made available to me.

All methods of data collection have their advantages and drawbacks. Interviews are influenced by the setting, the relationship between the participant and researcher, the candour or reticence of the participant, and so forth (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Observation can be awkward, even in the case of an insider who is observing proceedings. Indeed, I was once asked, "What *are* you looking for when you observe and take notes during our meetings?" The organization is new and documentation fairly scant, so although the task was not onerous, it was disappointing that there was little recorded evidence of how the issues under examination have been reflected in textual practices.

In the remainder of this section I provide specific details of the data collection, analysis, and (re)presentation processes of this research.

Interviews: Selecting Participants and the Interviewing Process

I wanted to include a range of participants that would, I hoped, permit the "proliferation of difference and the shattering of totalities" (Kaufman, 2001, p. 5). Therefore I felt that I could not leave the selection of the participants to chance, so I

avoided the snowball method and opted for purposeful sampling. Wellington (2000) referred to sampling of this type as "maximum variation sampling" (p. 61). From my prior experience with the group, as well as having attended a few events in the months prior to the research, I felt that I had a sense of some of their dispositions. There were few women from whom to choose, so I invited all three of the women who were currently involved in the Coalition (one member returned partway through the process of interviewing, but I felt that it was too late to include her). I also wanted to include members of the less predominant sects, the Shi'a and the Ismaili. Only one Shi'a was available for interview during the time that I was collecting data, but there were two Ismailis. That meant that I would interview seven Sunnis. Without pre-screening, I could not possibly know the participants' levels of orthodoxy for certain, so I had to deduce from group discussions whether they were more or less orthodox in their practice. Only one member could be considered a secular Muslim; the rest of the interviewees were actively practicing Muslims. (In chapter 4 I go into greater detail about the complexities of collecting and presenting demographic data in this context.)

I contacted the potential participants by e-mail to invite them to become involved in my study and explained the nature and purpose of the research, the ethical procedures, the likely uses of the findings, and what their participation would involve (Appendix A). I asked them to contact me if they agreed to be interviewed. All ten people whom I contacted agreed; however, it was months before many of those whom I eventually interviewed were available.

The interviews were semi structured in format (see Appendix B for a list of the interview questions) to open up space for the participants to reflect or insert questions or

issues of their own sparked by our conversation. Although I specified in my letter of invitation an interview time of one hour maximum, many participants encouraged me to extend the conversation. The interviews took place in a variety of locations, and I followed the preference of each participant. Two took place in fairly public locations, which made for poor sound quality on the recordings. Two were at a mosque, three took place at people's places of work, two were in people's homes, and one was in my office.

I was surprised at how nervous I was before many of the interviews, but two in particular stand out: the interviews that I conducted at the mosques. I found myself worried about how to dress: Should I cover my head or not? How covered should my body be? I worried more about how to dress for the interviews than I do when I go to pray. I realized that I was worried about what the interviewees would think about me. Either way could have been problematic: If I dressed too atypically, they would know it, and I wondered if they would see me as putting on some kind of act. If I dressed in my usual style (e.g., no *hijab*), I might cause offence or embarrassment. In the end I compromised but felt slightly uncomfortable during most of the interviews, though both participants were gracious and forthcoming.

Although I had prepared questions and sent them ahead to the participants, I was ready to follow their lead. However, I was surprised that four of the people I interviewed had prepared extensive written notes and had clearly given a great deal of thought to my questions. They wanted to speak to all of the questions that I asked. For others the conversation traversed new ground.

I transcribed the conversations, omitting only those parts that were so tangential to the research as to have no bearing on it. Then, with their permission, I e-mailed the

transcript to each person I interviewed and asked for revisions or additions that he or she wished to make. No one asked for changes to the transcript, and only one offered a comment: She felt that she had been inarticulate.

Observation

The literature speaks about the various roles of an observer in the research setting. Wellington (2000) described the observer as ranging from complete participant to complete observer, depending upon what he or she does and any prior relationship to the group. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) distinguished between the observer who assumes an air of complete objectivity and the postmodern observer who discloses his or her locatedness. In this particular research context the lines were even more blurred. I was a participant, but not at the time of the data collection. However, the chair clearly demarcated my role at each event by introducing me and explaining that I was there to observe and take notes. I did not participate in any of the conversations, which would have been inappropriate during a business meeting in any case. At the one non-business event at which I had permission to take notes (an information workshop with the media), I interacted freely with those around me and even helped two members to set out the refreshments. Although one of my roles, that of observer/researcher, was clearly demarcated, my relationships with many in the research site were more intimate, this complicated and blurred the boundaries of my roles. As with many other facets of this study, my role as an observer was part of a complex set of nested relationships.

If my role was not clear, my reasons for engaging in observation were. They were twofold. First, I wanted to have a sense of how those I interviewed participated in the meetings, how often they spoke, whether others sought their opinions, and so forth.

Second, I hoped to learn more about how the group as a whole discussed issues that might be related to negotiating identity differences. Although I did take note of the structure of the surroundings and the form of the meetings, my purpose was very specific, so, unlike ethnographic observation, I was not detailing every aspect of the setting or the interactions of those in the setting. I used a standard recording template for each session (Appendix C) that allowed me to record what was happening as well as my immediate responses to the context, behaviours, or conversation.

In terms of bias or identifying with those whom I was interviewing, I have clearly revealed in other parts of this study that I have a relationship with the group as a whole and with many people in the group. I identify as a Muslim and have been and continued throughout this research to be active in the community in antiracism work. Unlike positivist methods of data collection, in a postpositive paradigm the presence of bias is part of the process of doing insider research. This is mitigated by a clear declaration of bias as well as careful attention to the representation of the findings.

Document Review

Wellington's (2000) typology of documents is helpful in describing the nature of the documents that I used in the study. Those I used were restricted, "available only by gaining special permission" and what Wellington refers to as, published 2, or those documents that are "available free on application or via the internet" (p. 112). Authorship ranged from private, which included correspondence and e-mails written by individual members of the group, to that of a subcommittee. I gained access to the documents in two ways. I was aware of some documents that I asked permission to review. These included the organization's terms of reference and by-laws (02 DOC) and a public education

document called *Towards Understanding Muslims in Canada* (05 DOC). I received both of these in hard copy and electronic forms. Other documents were either brought to my attention or were sent to me unsolicited. These ranged from articles about the group that appeared in various media to correspondence on matters of public policy to internal planning documents. In total, I reviewed 25 documents.

Analyzing the Data

In general, there are two main aspects to the analytic process, the organization of the data and the interpretation of it (Wellington, 2000). Of course, the two are deeply intertwined, but it was helpful to think of the task in this way. Wellington also identified three stages in the life of the analytic journey. The first is "data reduction" (p. 134), during which time the researcher begins to select key data and code and sort them. I listened to the tapes, organized my field notes, and reviewed and sorted the documents. Next, the data are organized in a way that "allows the researcher to conceptualize" (p. 134) them. Finally, the data are interpreted, which "involves searching for themes, patterns and regularities" (p. 134). This schema was clear and simple enough to save me from becoming too lost in the data.

In the earliest stages of the study I read in Wellington (2000) that

> data analysis is part of the research cycle, not a discrete phase near the end of a research plan. It must begin early, in order to influence emerging research design and future data collection, i.e. it is formative, not summative. (p. 134)

Thus I began to think of all of my reflective and reflexive practices that occurred in connection with data collection as analytic opportunities. Marginalia of my observational notes, notes that I wrote in the car after an interview, preliminary transcriptions, and even

my reasons for collecting and cataloguing documents served to mark an analytic path of sorts.

I began by using colours to mark the interview transcripts and my transcribed observation notes. I simply used the highlighter function on the computer and created a legend to connect colours to broad conceptual categories. After I completed that task, I read through the documents and used coloured post-it notes or highlighters to mark the text (unless it was an electronic text, and then I used the comment function on my word processor to mark the text). After going through the data in this way, I began to code the text using themes. At this point I had been treating all of the data as a source of text—data from interviews, observations, and documents. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested that themes can be derived from the literature review or the data themselves. In this case I used both. This evolved into what became my "code book" (p. 274), which I used to configure and reconfigure the "chunks of text" (p. 277) that I analyzed. However, because I did not use a deductive process, it was important not to become trapped in the categories that Silverman (2003) cautioned can become "a powerful conceptual grid from which it is difficult to escape" (p. 348). This reminder proved to be very useful when I was 'stuck' on several occasions. Usually I was stuck because I was trying too hard to fit the data into the categories I had developed and was not letting it speak to me directly. I found this to be an iterative process, and I returned to the codebook several times to think and rethink the themes that emerged. I found the synthesis of the data the most difficult phase of the process because so many of the particular stories had to be left behind, a task that I felt was a betrayal of the participants, who had so carefully reflected upon the questions.

Emancipatory research, according to Lather (1991), emerges when theory is not allowed to "protect us from the awesome complexity of the world" (p. 62). It was my goal to engage in data analysis that not only surfaced elegant responses to the research question, but also allowed the tensions, ambiguities, and ambivalences of the participants to emerge and instruct.

Trustworthiness

Research conducted within a postpositivist paradigm relies on criteria other than internal validity to determine its worth (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Mertens, 1998; Smith & Deemer, 2003; Wellington, 2000). Lather (1991) recommended using triangulation, construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity to replace internal validity. Briefly, triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data to "seek counter patterns as well as convergence" (p. 67). Construct validity refers to reflexive rigor, which continuously "tests the weak points of the theoretical tradition we are operating from" (p. 67). Although not without its problems, face validity, which is the provision of an opportunity for the participants to respond to and influence the findings, can be an important aspect of trustworthiness. Finally, catalytic validity "represents the degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses and energizes participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it" (p. 68). Among many other forms of validity, Lincoln and Guba (2000) also suggested that fairness is a criterion for judging the trustworthiness of a study. Fairness is reflected in the balanced representation of voices in the research: "Omission of stakeholder or participant voices reflects, we believe, a form of bias" (p. 180). Within the limits of the study and its resources, I attempted to conform with all of these qualifiers.

Triangulation and Construct Validity

In the case of triangulation, I used three methods of data collection—interviews, observation, and documents—which were invaluable in allowing both corroboration and contestation. The areas of contestation spurred returns to the theory and analytical process, which resulted, I believe, in a deeper understanding of the data. This dialectical encounter between the data and the theory engendered the establishment of construct validity. I made space for, struggled with, and sometimes had to recalibrate the theoretical constructs to make them respond to what the research participants were saying. Although a very disheartening process at times, it seemed a better way to interpret the data.

Face Validity

The third form of trustworthiness that I addressed was face validity. I did this in several ways. First, I submitted all of the interview transcripts to the participants for comment or critique. Second, I had an opportunity to chat informally from time to time with various members of the Coalition. I would update them on what I was learning from the findings and ask for their thoughts. Although not as rigorous as a focus group or formal interviews (their schedules were such that they could not afford the time for more formal contact), these informal check-ins were helpful in giving me a sense of what the participants thought about how I was interpreting the data. Finally, I was able to present the findings to the group as a whole and have a discussion with them during the writing of the findings. Their comments and critique suggested not only that the findings represented their shared thoughts, but also that I had represented the contestations and anomalies as well.

Three questions/comments attest to this in particular. First, one of the participants asked whether I would write an article to sum up my findings and to highlight the work of the Coalition; the group perceived this as an excellent idea, and I agreed to do it. Second, they suggested that I formally acknowledge the pioneers of the organization, in the thesis as a tribute to their good work. One of the members asked whether I would outline more fully for the group the causes of coalition failure and how to avoid it, particularly as it relates to engagement with difference. Finally, another participant, who is a relatively new member of the Coalition, commented that my presentation (although brief) helped her to understand the dynamics of the organization more fully. All of these taken together, I felt, validated the study and helped to form my representation of their ideas in it.

Catalytic Validity

The aforementioned request for more information on the role of difference in the vitality of a coalition speaks, to at least a small degree, to catalytic validity, as does the Coalition's desire to write about these issues and to continue to talk about how the members engage with difference. A second interesting coincidence is the strategic planning document that the Coalition developed during the time that I was interviewing for the study. This document raised the issue of difference and how to engage with its potentially destructive capacity if it is not addressed. Two participants make oblique references to it during their interviews by saying, 'Well, we are starting to think about these issues.' While I cannot establish a causal link between my question posing and the highlighting of difference in the strategic plan, I find the synchronicity interesting.

Fairness

Although I could not include every member of the Coalition in the interview process, I did attempt to represent the multiple voices that were present through the interviews that I conducted. As I indicated in the section on data collection, I used a method of recruiting participants in which I intentionally attempted to hear as many perspectives as possible, including contrary ones. I also tried to include a fairly equal number of stories from each person and although the actual word counts of their quotes are not exactly equal I hoped that their voices, whether loud or soft, concordant or dissident, were fairly represented.

Taken together, these five dimensions of trustworthiness combine to provide a measure of credibility to the study. It appears to have credibility in the eyes of those who participated and those about whom it speaks. Moreover, I believe that it is theoretically credible after my careful and repeated recalibrations of the framework.

Ethics

This study was governed by the University of Alberta's regulations for ethical procedures in research that involves human subjects. I contacted the participants by e-mail to invite them into the study and inform them fully about the nature and conduct of the study. I explained to them, in writing and orally, the fact that their participation was voluntary and afforded them certain rights. All participants signed consent forms (Appendix D). This section reviews how I attended to these ethical issues.

Right to Withdraw

Although the organization granted me permission to proceed with the study, I obtained individual permission to interview each participant. I explained their right to

withdraw on five occasions: when they agreed to be interviewed, at the beginning of each interview when they signed the consent form, at the conclusion of the interview, when they reviewed their transcripts, and when they reviewed their quotations before I finalized the thesis. I also emphasized that there would be no penalty for withdrawal.

Right to Limit the Amount of Participation

Although the consent form mentioned the possibility of a second interview, many participants found it difficult to make time for even a single interview; therefore, I limited any supplementary contact to e-mail. I made this amendment verbally during the first interview with each participant, with the exception of one individual who agreed to meet informally, without audio-recording equipment, on two subsequent occasions.

Recording and Transcription of Interviews

I received permission before arriving at the interview site to record the conversation and confirmed the acceptability of that arrangement upon arrival at the interview. Once the transcripts were completed, I mailed them electronically to the participants for their approval. No one withdrew or disapproved of his or her transcript.

Confidentiality

This was one of the most difficult ethical commitments to fulfill. The Coalition is small, the members know each other very well, and any identifier other than gender would immediately have breached confidentiality. To contextualize the data, I have presented the demographic information as an amalgamation and have omitted any identifiers that applied only to a single individual. This was a compromise that I had to make to protect the participants' confidentiality. I explained their right to confidentiality at the beginning of each interview and in writing when I submitted their quotations for

their approval prior to the finalization of the thesis. Although some members were comfortable with my using the real name of the organization in the thesis, not all were so I omitted any reference to the name of the coalition.

Use, Storage, and Destruction of Data

I reviewed the methods of storage with the participants and reminded them that I would keep the data in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroy it. I also informed them that I would use their data for the purposes of writing this thesis and that the thesis could give rise to other articles or conference presentations.

The Challenges of Representation

In *Getting Smart*, Lather (1991) set out a series of questions for researchers as a means of guiding their representation of the data. The list is too exhaustive to cite here in totality, but several questions were particularly important for me as I wrote the findings:

> Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity or did I impose order and structure?
> What is most densely invested? What has been muted, repressed, unheard? How has what I've done shaped, subverted, complicated? Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions of closure?
> Did I create a text that was multiple without being pluralistic, double without being paralyzed? Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified? (p. 84)

These questions served as important touchstones during the many times that I felt lost in the data analysis.

I hoped that in presenting the findings I would be able to integrate my various conversations with the participants so that they could begin to speak to one another about their fears, hopes, and joys of being in coalition with those who were once, and in some cases perhaps still are, considered to be Other. To allow for this play of ideas, I tried to

balance coming-to-conclusions with giving space to the paradoxes, tensions, and ambiguities that inevitably surfaced in the conversations, my observations, and the documents. Seen through the lens of Smith and Deemer (2003) this marked the beginning of my engagement with the "…practical and moral problem of representation."

However, I made the mistake of thinking that I should know what I wanted to write before writing. For many weeks I imagined how I would write up the conversations that had been swirling in my mind for almost two years. I was so close to those voices that at times they seemed more real than my own. I had a feeling of overwhelming responsibility to the participants and to my community. I felt oppressed by this responsibility, and it kept me from writing. It kept their voices locked in my brain and off the paper. The following excerpt is from my process journal:

> I find myself dreaming about what participants have said. I wake up with chunks of 'data' floating in my brain. I am swimming in a sea of voices, not my own. Sometimes I feel like I am drowning in their stories and they cease to have any meaning, they are just words. This morning I awoke from a dream about interviews that didn't happen. I was asking a whole new set of questions, about Eid Ramadan. The trouble is before I even get to the computer I am exhausted. I am tired of their words. I want my own voice back. (October 27, 2006)

It was Richardson (2000) who helped me out of this place: "Writing is a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (p. 923). Once I began to write, putting onto paper what was in my head, moving the participants' words around, it became easier to let go of my need to create the perfect set of findings, and I was able to come to terms with the incompleteness of any account, including an accounting of the stories of the participants (Smith and Deemer, 2003). Finally I was able to let the voices speak for themselves and we stopped being in competition, their words and I.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explored the nature of a study that is both interpretive and emancipatory. Such a study must allow for both scholarly rigor and the multiplicity consistent with the paradigm. I discussed how I attended to the rigor by using Lather's (1991) criteria for trustworthiness—triangulation, construct validity, and face validity—and Lincoln and Guba's (2000) fairness criteria. Guidance in the task of producing this study also came from Lather. Her interrogative framework surfaces particular challenges that the researcher faces in writing the findings of the study. In particular, I found her cautions related to the researcher's authority overwhelming the text to be helpful. Richardson's (2000) reflections on the purpose of the text were helpful in limiting the scope of the audience and freeing me from writing poorly for too many people rather than writing meaningfully for a smaller audience.

The ethical issues associated with this particular study also provided an important framework. They served to circumscribe the behaviour of the researcher in such a way as to protect the participants from harm and to ensure that the data are used for the purposes that they were intended. The issue of ethics is threaded throughout the project from the time prior to the collection of the data until the final product is approved.

The writing of this study revealed the fact that I am accountable to three relationships. The first is my relationship to the Muslim community. I wanted to write the findings in a way that would be helpful by sparking dialogue and not appearing threateningly critical or adding to the oppressive burdens that it already faces. Second, I was responsible to the university and to the field of theory to which I hoped to contribute. I wanted to produce a credible, interesting, and useful piece of research. Finally, I was

responsible to myself, to fulfill a desire to ask and answer questions of import to me. Again, Richardson (2000) offered this wisdom: "Poststructuralism . . . frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone" (p. 929). Thus freed, I wrote for those who believe that working for social justice means working with those who are different from us. I wrote for those of us who are struggling to confront the ways in which we construct binaries and categories that separate and oppress. Some of us are in the Muslim community, some of us are in the academy, and some of us are doing antiracist work or peace work or gay-rights work. There is no one audience or one purpose for this study. My hope is that it resonates where it is needed.

CHAPTER 4:
EXPERIENCES OF SELF AND OTHER IN A RACIALIZED COALITION

Introduction

The underlying question that these findings address is how do coalitions develop cohesion and yet still allow for the multiplicity of voices within them? The findings fall under two broad themes, understanding self and Other and coalitional processes for negotiating difference. This chapter focuses on issues of self and Other, and Chapter 5 explores topics related to the theme of coalitional process for negotiating difference. The purpose of this chapter is to represent how within this particular site the members I interviewed understand what it means for them to be a Muslim, their motivations for becoming involved in a Muslim coalition, how they perceive one another, and how they collectively engage with the idea of identity and difference while building coherence and cohesion.

The participants' comments reflect a desire on the part of those within the Coalition to forge a strong collective voice for Muslims in Edmonton as well as to provide leadership to other Muslim communities within Canada and beyond. However, their reflections and observations also reveal interesting contradictions, tensions, and ambivalences about their own and others' identities. This suggests that the task of negotiating identities and differences in a coalitional setting is complicated by the presence of multiple histories, sets of assumptions, and, in the case of this study, conceptualizations of identity. Sometimes history and experience lead individuals to want

to re-inscribe the boundaries of an identity category, whereas other histories and other experiences create a predisposition to more fluid understandings of identity.

The chapter begins with the section, Attending to Sensitivities Regarding Identity, which helps to situate the 10 interviewees by describing their characteristics and discussing the particular sensitivities of this group regarding the revelation of identifiers. In the next section, Why This? Why Now? I discuss the participants' motivations for becoming involved in the Coalition. The final section, "Who Can Define a Proper Muslim?" Multiplicity, Essentialism, and the Muslim Community, explores how individual coalition members understand identity and how it is represented in some of the Coalition's documents.

Attending to Sensitivities Regarding Identity

I had to address three sets of relationships in presenting these findings: relations among the Coalition members who agreed to be interviewed, my relationships with the interviewees, and my relationship with the Coalition as a whole. Several challenges arose out of and play into the caretaking of the relationships in the context of the presentation of the findings. Relevant to this presentation was the limited amount of demographic data that I was able to collect as a result of the need to safeguard confidentiality.

During the time that the interviews took place the leadership group had 16 members. Their backgrounds are quite diverse in terms of organizational affiliation, nationality or ethnicity, first language, age, sect, and the number of generations in Canada. This is a reflection of the Coalition's attempt to engage a diverse leadership group from within the broader community of organizations to represent various identities and interests of Muslims in Edmonton. Generally speaking, that makes each member of

the leadership team unique and therefore easily identified by other members of the group and to a certain portion of the community at large who might be more familiar with their work. In spite of this restriction, it is still useful to enunciate the various characteristics that make up this group.

My intention was to engage as diverse a group of perspectives as possible, so I aimed for a representative sampling. This makes each interviewee demographically unique and increases the challenges of protecting identity. To respect the sensitivities of those I interviewed, I agreed not to connect nationality, religious, or institutional affiliations as part of the data collection. Complicating their uniqueness and therefore their identifiably was the nature of the participants' comments, which were in most cases very candid. Because those I interviewed have not necessarily voiced these ideas within the Coalition, it was important that I protect the identity of the speakers to avoid pre-empting the natural progression of the group.

All of these considerations raise the question of how to represent the complex nature of the identities. To address this problem, I present a portrait of the participants through a series of groupings that highlight the complexity of identities while not affixing a particular set of characteristics to specific individuals. All direct quotations are formatted in italics, and the numbers that follow each quotation refer to the line numbers from the transcript.

A Portrait of the Research Participants

At the time of the data collection it was not possible to interview an even number of men and women without reducing my sample size or omitting other identities that I

wanted to include. In the end, I was able to interview three women, Miriam, Sarah, and Nadia, who range in ages from the early 40s to the mid 50s. I also interviewed seven men, Amin, Anwar, Jamal, Lewis, Martin, Yaqoob, and Yusuf. Their age range was somewhat wider, from the late 30s to the late 50s. At the time of their interviews Yaqoob, Amin, Marion, Sarah, Yusuf, Martin, Jamal, and Anwar had been with the organization since its very beginnings. Lewis and Nadia joined about two years after the group began. Four of those I interviewed were born in Canada, and six emigrated from non-American nations. These 10 individuals represent affiliations with seven of the eight Islamic organizations that are members of the Coalition. I interviewed two Ismaili Muslims, one Shi'a Muslim, and seven Sunni Muslims.

In some respects this is a fairly homogeneous grouping, with 9 of the 10 interviewees identifying with either Middle Eastern or South Asian countries/cultures. The absence of, for example, Asian, Black, European, and Central Asian Muslims speaks to this homogeneity. All of those I interviewed have at least some postsecondary education, and many have more advanced degrees. As one of those I spoke with noted, the emphasis has been on engaging leaders who are educated and who have some connections to business or professional interests. This group is also homogeneous with respect to class. Table 2 summarizes the demographics of this group. What is not quantified is the range of orthodoxy, an identity that is taken up in Chapter 5 and is, at best, a matter of subjective interpretation and probably beyond classification.

Confidentiality issues were compounded in this study by the complexity of identities and the identifiability of the participants. Their identities are so complexly unique that even attaching nationality to gender would have been sufficient, in

combination with their comments, to have identified them. By protecting their identity and confidentiality, I was seeking to protect their relationships with one another, my relationships with them, and the integrity of the Coalition itself.

Table 2

Demographics of the Research Participants

Demographic	Number	Total
Gender		
Female	3	
Male	7	10
Sect		
Shi'a	1	
Ismaili	2	
Sunni	7	10
Nationality/ethnicity		
S. Asian Origins	4	
Middle Eastern Origins	6	10
Place of birth		
Canada	4	
Migrated from abroad	6	10

Why This? Why Now? Participant Motivation for Engaging in Coalition Work

This section explores what motivates people to overcome isolation or sectarian differences and seek a common framework for understanding and addressing social and political issues. Of the 10 people I interviewed, 8 had very strong motivations for becoming involved. Their motivations can be broadly themed as fear of intensified racism or backlash, a desire for the voice and issues of Muslims to be amplified within the Canadian political and social context, bridge building among the various Muslim

communities, and the creation of opportunities to forge stronger links with Canadian society at large. The other two respondents were motivated enough to participate in the work of this group, but their primary allegiances or orientations were not to this coalition.

Healing Rifts Among Communities

The most frequently mentioned motivating factor relates to the need for Muslims of all types, degree of orthodoxy, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and colour to confront the existence of barriers among themselves and commit to the necessary work required to dismantle them. There was a sense among five of the participants that, particularly within the context of Canada where, at least in theory, there is a predisposition to working across difference, it was counterproductive for Muslims to continue to resist working together on shared issues.

Martin, Nadia, Amin, Sarah and Lewis all expressed a desire to "build bridges," "form relationships," and "have an internal dialogue" with members outside of their own sects or organizations. Most of those I interviewed felt optimistic about the possibility of nurturing stronger connections with one another through working with and learning about each other's understanding of Islam, Muslim identity, values, beliefs, and practices.

Divisions that exist within the Muslim community today can be attributed to a number of factors, but the most relevant for members of this coalition are the sectarian differences. Yaqoob suggested that the *"events that took place after the death of the Prophet on the succession to Mohammed, . . . the vibration of those events are felt in the communities today"* (277-279). He referred to the dispute about who would lead the Muslim community upon the death of Mohammed (PBUH). The community split into two factions that became the Shi'a and the Sunni. The Ismailis are a group who emerged

from a further branching out of the Shi'a sect. These branches or sects of Islam have evolved different practices, interpretations, and foci over the centuries, all of which have contributed to their social separation from one another.

Lewis suggested that not all of these divisions are solely the result of the founding of the three main sects. In his view many of these divisions originate with or were exacerbated by colonial tactics. Post World Wars I and II, in the Middle East and Asia, national boundaries he said, were drawn without consideration of historical alliances and natural communities. People were divided and forced into national arrangements that did not conform to any of the natural communities that had evolved over time. *"It's been a colonial trick for a long time to have people fighting amongst themselves"* (Lewis, 279-280). He expressed hope that this effort at building solidarity might serve to resist and undo the effects of colonialism. However, sectarian differences and the legacy of colonialism are not the only differences that contribute to the disconnection among various members of the broader Muslim community. Nationality, race, gender, language, class, number of generations in Canada, and sexual orientation all contribute to how Muslims choose to affiliate and how closely connected they feel to one another as Muslims. This will be discussed more fully in the third section of the chapter.

Over time these differences and those that result from migration and resettlement have led to a loss of contact among the various *masjids*, mosques, *imambargahs*, *jammat khanas*, and various religion-based organizations and socio-religious groups. Nadia joined the group after it had been in existence for some time. She agreed to sit as a director because she *"hadn't really realized until then how insular I had been, not having worked outside, in a voluntary sense, with other groups"* (12-14). The idea of co-

operation between communities, of collaborating on bigger issues and projects, is viewed as a means of *"bridge building within the Ummah, of working together rather than competing"* (Amin, 12).

Indeed, it appears that among existing but highly localized organizations there is for the first time support for and a belief in the value and importance of a coalition that would bridge sectarian, national, gendered, racial, and ideological differences. "*We asked every organization [to send a representative], and every organization was very happy. They said, 'You know what? We've been waiting for this'*" (Anwar, 54-56.

Resisting the Effects of Racialization

Four of the 10 interviewees pointed to the existence of exclusionary or discriminatory practices as motivating their involvement in the Coalition. In Sarah's estimation,

> *a lot of issues are decided, whether it's politics or Canada introducing certain legislation that has negative consequences for Muslims, whether it's immigration or whatever. . . . We're constantly being reminded of the negativity. You know Muslims are terrorists; you see that in television, movies, books; you know, all over the place.* (265-270)

> *I always would . . . pray, . . . How can I help? How can I be part of something to fix this? How can I contribute? And so I did go to the very first workshop, and I must say, . . . that was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me personally. . . . Finally a group, finally someone is going to be addressing some of the needs that the community has.* (6-14)

According to Sarah, the challenges that Muslims face have been longstanding and embedded in much of the fabric of society, including its politics, its culture, and its policies. She communicated in the first part of her comments a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. In the face of cultural hegemony and racism, what can one person do? Her sense of relief and hopefulness in the second part of the comments are a response to the

advent of a collective intelligence and will to address the issues, to be active subjects rather than passive objects in the civic sphere. Similarly, her colleague Yusuf observed that there have been "backlashes" before, but nothing that had disrupted his sense of being fairly comfortable as a Muslim in Canada. But after 9/11, *"it actually became critical that we all get together and try and basically prevent any backlash, and so a lot of it was fear, fear of the future and the unknown"* (5-11). Both Sarah and Yusuf perceived not only that racism and its effects are a serious problem for Muslims, but also that 9/11 would exacerbate that problem in potentially much more serious ways. Yusuf articulated that the possible effects were unknowable and that the factor of not knowing is what contributes to the fear.

For both Sarah and Yusuf, the Coalition represented potency, and they both expressed the belief that collective potency offers the possibility of defending one's group from further harm. Sarah referred to a sense of vulnerability in the past that arose from feelings of isolation within Canadian society, whereas Yusuf's vulnerability was a fear of encountering the future without an organized response to potential threats.

The Power of a Collective Voice: The Need for Cohesion

In spite of the fairly large numbers of Muslims in Canada (and globally), five participants shared the perception that Muslims are not able to mitigate public policies or legislation that discriminates against them. Nor, they felt, are their views or identities represented or presented with any degree of fairness or accuracy in the Western media. This results in at least two problems in particular: misrepresentation in the news and entertainment media and the creation of policies and legislation that may have a deleterious effect upon Muslims.

In response to my question about what prompted his involvement in the Coalition, Yaqoob said:

> *I think my motivation started from the time that I became conscious of the environment around me—and I'm talking about not just the Canadian or Edmonton environment; that is the world environment—when you found that in spite of there being billions of Muslims around [the world], Muslims did not have a voice, did not have a strong voice either in world politics or at local levels, and that was the cause of a lot of frustration for a number of reasons. First of all, I feared that we could be marginalized. Secondly, we could be viewed through a different set of glasses that was fearful, because what could likely happen is that that vocal minority would portray the views of the silent majority. And the third thing was there's a lot of talent in the Muslim leadership that wasn't being harnessed for the greater good of the Muslim community at large.* (9-19)

Sheer numbers do not lead to emancipation, inclusion, or fair representative practices. To resist oppressive practices, a group such as the racialized Muslim community requires voice. And voice, according to Yaqoob, is achieved through collective efforts of a wide range of Muslims, not just a vocal few. He suggested that the lack of leadership has resulted in the absence of collective action. Without good leadership and the subsequent unity of purpose, a vocal minority within the Muslim community has taken the liberty of speaking on behalf of the entire community, paradoxically obscuring the complexity of the community. The final consequence of an essentialist expression of *a* Muslim community is that the Canadian community-at-large sees Muslims through a distorted set of lenses; hence the fear of Muslims. This motivation, as other comments from Yaqoob reveal, surfaces in his desire to maintain porous boundaries, resist essentialisms as a means of engendering coalitional politics. The Coalition, in Yaqoob's estimation, has the potential to harness this complexity and to leverage the capacities of the Muslim community in Canada both for the good of Canada at large and for the well-being of Muslim Canadians.

Since before the Coalition's inception, Anwar has worked tirelessly to help build coalitional consciousness among Muslims which for him entails recognizing the sorts of differences that exist within the community. He articulated some of the community's complexity:

> *[The] Muslim community is very diverse. First of all, you have the religion itself. You have in the sects in the religion: You have the Sunnis, the Shi'as, the Ismailis, the Ahmadiyyas. . . . And then when you go to each individual community—the Sunni community, for example—we're diverse. We have the Arabs, we have the Pakistanis, we have the Somalis. . . . In the Sunni sect we have six mosques. And then, for example, Al Rashid mosque; . . . the majority that come here are Lebanese. Of course lots of other ethnic groups come, but it's mostly Lebanese. The Markaz-ul-Islam, which is in Mill Woods, is for Pakistanis; there are Lebanese that go in there, but [not] the majority. So this is for Lebanese, this is for Pakistanis, the downtown mosque is for Somalis, the Al Amin mosque is for the Fiji community.* (21-32)

Anwar's motivation to support the formation of the Coalition arose out of a desire to see the Muslim community engage on a political level. He argued that it is possible to acknowledge the differences that exist and at the same time forge a common cause:

> *We should do something that we've been waiting for a long time, and maybe the community now is ready to accept it" (18-20).We said [to leaders of various Muslim organizations], 'What do you think about creating an umbrella organization that does not take from your personal religious thing, but takes something that you might not be able to do,[we] will do it on your behalf?' (50-52)*

This might include *"public policy, education—not religious education, but public education, interfaith— . . . communication, which is media and represents you"* (47-49).

Although these differences, described by Anwar, carry enough weight within the community for people to have clustered together for the purpose of worship Anwar did not see these differences as a hindrance to collective action because the action is predicated upon rectifying structural issues. It was clear to him that a distinction has to be made between the political agenda and the religious agenda. In attempting to engage the support of various organizations, he sought to reassure people that although the

organization is predicated upon the identity Muslim, it is in no way an organization whose mission or vision would be associated with religious issues; nor would it seek to homogenize practice. He also believed that to accomplish this, there has to be a separation of the political from the religious. Anwar envisioned accomplishing this by formulating a common cause upon rectifying structural issues. He observed that *"the law is coming down, the legislation is coming down; it does not differentiate between a Sunni or a Ismaili"* (45-47). For Anwar, things religious remain within the sphere of the personal or the house of worship; the work of a coalition is socio-political.

Although Anwar understood that the need for Muslims to be more organized is fairly longstanding, internal divisions and the lack of motivation to synchronize efforts have precluded the viability of anything like an umbrella organization or coalition or organizations. In his opinion, the community had never been ready to leave sectarian, ethnic or other differences behind to achieve a collective objective. In the aftermath of 9/11, for reasons that both Yusuf and Sarah articulated, he thought that the community might be willing to work collaboratively.

Integrating Into Canadian Society

The fourth impetus for members' becoming active in the Coalition was the opportunity to forge stronger connections between the Muslim community and the rest of Canada. Five members of the group I interviewed contended that Canadians misunderstand Muslims and that, for many reasons, some Muslims have a tendency to keep to themselves. Taken together, the result is that some—maybe even many—Muslims feel that they are on the margins of Canadian society. This is not unusual within immigrant communities; however, what is unusual is that Muslims have been in Canada

for over 100 years and are still struggling to find their place. Efforts to fit into Canadian life are complicated by many factors: skin colour, language barriers, a lack of recognition of their professional credentials, and dress. But possibly most important, exclusion is perceived to occur by virtue of their religious affiliation. Yaqoob's sense is that even what he termed *mainstream Muslims*—that is, Muslims who are fairly well integrated into Canadian life—"*have not enjoyed the political inclusiveness, they have not enjoyed the same benefits that other [minority] groups [have]*" (307-308).

Whether by intention through colonialism and neo-Orientalist practices or by accident through ignorance, Muslim culture and values are depicted as being inherently alien to Western values and the Western way of life. In spite of this view that many in the West have of Muslims, several participants articulated their desire through the work of the Coalition to *"let Canadians know that we are Canadians as well"* (Yusuf, 15-18) and that *"we want to be active, vibrant members of the community"* (Jamal, 55-58). The Muslims in the Coalition harbour a strong desire to *integrate* into Canadian life and to contribute to it, and they view themselves as Canadians with a particular religious orientation rather than as having a religious identity that happens to live in this particular place. According to Yusuf, *"most of us are pretty much aware of the Canadian scene and consider ourselves Canadians before we're Arab or Pakistani."* (181).

Importance of Considering the Participants' Motivations

It is important to consider the remainder of the findings within the context of these perceptions and understandings for two reasons. First, perceptions of marginality and feelings of fear can contribute to a community's feeling that it is "under siege" (Razack, 2004, p. 132). Thus many view the creation of a coalition as a means of

survival. These conditions can lead to what Bannerji (2000) described as a kind of defensive essentialism, a circling of the wagons in what is perceived to be a defence against a common threat. This use of the common threat to silence both internal heterogeneity and critical reflection on community issues is understandable and dangerous—understandable because the marginalization is real and the need for coherent activism is real, but dangerous because it suppresses voices within the community who may have other needs that are not being heard or met. In either case it is the challenge of the larger identity community to attempt to create coherence without hegemony.

This leads to the second point, which is that, although racialized identities serve as the objects of racism, discrimination and marginalization, or rejection—even from within one's own identity group—they also have the potential to provide a rallying point for collective action. Working with other Muslims on shared goals and objectives appears to have provided a sense of confidence in some of the research participants that they can effect positive change with respect to fighting inequity and exclusion in Canada.

Dissenting Views

Not everyone I interviewed was as unequivocally enthusiastic about either the value or the feasibility of the Coalition. It is important to give voice to the two individuals who were more ambivalent about its role and value. Although Miriam and Jamal both articulated the *potential* value of the group, their motivations were of a slightly different quality. They both joined the Coalition with very specific passions that they hoped to fulfill in concert with other like-minded Muslims.

Jamal is involved in another Muslim organization that he sees as a better match for his values and Islamic principles; however, he sees strategic value in being involved with the Coalition. Jamal identified the Coalition as

> *an organization that could take us [the organization he represents in the Coalition] a step further, and the community, in terms of politics. So that's the strength that I see in the [Coalition]. And we have to be in every organization that serves our goal.* (57-59)

However, there is some dissonance between his religious values and the Coalition's emphasis on strategy. Earlier in the interview he said that what he considers to be Islamic principles are sometimes sacrificed for a strategic goal, and he finds these compromises challenging. Jamal stated:

> *To be honest, I feel stronger outside of [the Coalition]. I'm strong within [the Coalition]; I feel stronger outside [the Coalition] because things that I want to do and the things that I believe in, I find them outside the [the Coalition].* (276-278)

What he was saying is that whereas the collective provides one kind of strength, strategic or political, the organization that he represents, his 'home' organization, is where he feels spiritually comfortable.

Although differing in specifics, Miriam's concerns are similar to Jamal's. Miriam saw the Coalition as an opportunity to be more involved in a comprehensive interfaith program; however, that has not proven to be a priority for the group, which she finds frustrating:

> *But my thought in the beginning was, how do you go out of the Muslim community and create bridges? . . . And nothing's basically happened with the interfaith committee, so that I feel a bit frustrated. There is an incredible opportunity to do something that's completely non-threatening, and this opportunity is being lost [grassroots interfaith work].* (141-142, 149-151)

In Miriam's case her priority is not synchronous with the Coalition's. She has interpreted this lack of emphasis as disinterest in this area of work, which she views as undermining her potential contribution. In another part of her interview she mentioned that she already does a great deal of interfaith work outside of this coalition, so her work does not depend on the coalition's viability. She also did not feel that her views about the importance of the work have been given weight, nor did she feel that she has been privy to why or how decisions are made to move or not move on some issues. Hence her frustration with the marginalization of what she believes to be an important aspect of the Coalition's program.

Although Miriam and Jamal's respective foci are very different, they both reflect the challenge of Coalition work, which is to build a broad base of support while staying focused. Clearly, both Miriam and Jamal were disappointed that their particular interests and concerns were being deferred to achieve other objectives. This privileging of agendas can be problematic, especially if it is not recognized and the legitimacy of the deferred agendas is not acknowledged. Whether Miriam and Jamal remain involved may depend upon the degree to which the Coalition can maintain an alignment between its objectives and theirs.

In summary, this section reviewed the range of motivators for becoming involved in the Coalition as the 10 participants identified them. Table 3 illustrates how many times they mentioned each of the motivators.

Table 3

Participants' Motivations for Becoming Involved in the Coalition

Motivator	Participants who identified it
Bridge building (5)	Amin, Nadia, Martin, Sarah, Yaqoob
Racism (5)	Anwar, Martin Yaqoob, Sarah, Yusuf
Canadian society (5)	Jamal, Miriam, Sarah, Yaqoob, Yusuf
Voice (4)	Anwar, Lewis, Sarah, Yaqoob

Table 3 illustrates the relatively even distribution of the four motivators and reveals that only one fewer participant cited *voice* as a motivator. What is striking about this list is the identification of bridge building among Muslim communities. Those who cited this as a motivator spoke about the need to learn about other Muslims to redress divisions that are the result of religious history, colonial intervention and insularity, and competitiveness. Such will to admit to these divisions speaks to the possibility of naming and negotiating the differences that separate as well as the commonalities that unite.

The remaining four motivators are more focused on commonly held beliefs or issues such as shared feelings of marginalization or racialization, the desire to feel that they are working for a common cause, and the need to reach out to other Canadians or integrate into Canadian society.

Table 4 presents in ascending order the number of motivators that each person identified.

Table 4

Number of Motivators That Each Research Participant Identified

Participant	Number of motivators

Amin	1
Jamal	1
Lewis	1
Miriam	1
Nadia	1
Anwar	2
Martin	2
Yusuf	2
Sarah	3
Yaqoob	4

Taken together, Tables 3 and 4 illustrate that the participants who had motivators aside from networking with Canadian society at large were more satisfied with the work of the group. This could mean that this is indeed the least emphasized aspect of the Coalition's objectives, or it could mean that Miriam and Jamal are not as strongly attached to their motivators as others are to theirs. It could also mean, as both Jamal and Miriam stated, that he has other outlets for his interests, and he views the Coalition as a secondary site of involvement, not a primary one.

This optimism about the possibility of achieving collectively what they have been unable to do as individual sects and organizations has not meant that there have been no challenges. A significant history of separation and isolation has resulted in a degree of insularity and protectiveness or disassociation, the effects of which are manifest in the coalitional context. The issue of how the Coalition engages with motivating interests that diverge from what emerges as the consensus (which does not necessarily mean unanimity) is discussed in the third section of this chapter when we return to Miriam and Jamal, as well as other points of tension within this coalition.

"Who Can Define a Proper Muslim?" Multiplicity, Essentialism, and the Muslim Community

The title of this section is taken from my conversation with Nadia. During part of that interview she asked a series of questions that interrogate identity and authenticity:

> *So who can point a finger at somebody else and say, "Well, you're not a proper Muslim." Who can say that? Nobody can say that. Who can define a proper Muslim? If you can define that for me, then we wouldn't be pointing fingers in the first place.* (480-485)

Since before its formal inception, while it was still a nascent dream, the Coalition and its individual members have struggled and still struggle with their conceptualization of the nature of identity as it relates to the subjectivity *Muslim*. Interviews with the participants as well as field notes that I took during observational opportunities and from document analyses reveal that there has been some discussion about what constitutes being a *real* Muslim and how to make space for both the presence and contestation of essentialist understandings of identity. There are some within the Coalition who appear to be challenging identity essentialisms by suggesting, as Nadia has, that endeavouring to determine the nature of a 'proper' Muslim is futile. There are others who regard their Muslim identity as metaphysically essential; that is, it transcends the realm of the constructed and is both fixed and a-historical. Sometimes these contestations manifest as debates about who is a *real* Muslim. In this section I present the multiple and sometimes contested understandings of the identity of Muslim and how these contestations play out in private reflections, representative practices, and collective conversation and dialogue. I develop three themes in this subsection. The first theme includes reflections and observations related to the ways in which the identity is understood to be contested. In particular, it explores the intersection of dichotomy and multiplicity. The issue of

representation is the second theme, in which the participants talked about how difficult it is to develop representative practices that satisfy the whole coalition. The final theme is concerned with how members believe that the coalition ought to take up issues of identity and multiplicity.

Dichotomy and Multiplicity: An Uneasy Alliance

There were varying perspectives on the nature of identity and, in particular, claims to Muslim authenticity in response to my questions on the existence of borders and centres of the community and who is situated where. Some did not believe that there were centres and margins and that Muslims occupy (within the context of the Muslim world) independent spheres of which none are dominant over any other

> *And so I think, to me, this was an opportunity for people to get beyond those labels and . . . to say, "You know what an Ismaili is? A Muslim, as is a Sunni a Muslim"—not whether you're a Sunni from Lebanon or a Sunni from Pakistan, right? We are Muslims, right?* (Amin, 60-63)

Others were very clear about the marginalization of Shi'a and Ismaili Muslims. In fact, a member of the Sunni community maintained, *"This is me putting words in someone's mouth, but I have a sense that the Ismaili and the Shiite [Shi'a] communities have felt marginalized by the Sunni communities"* (Lewis, 280-285). Yaqoob and Yusuf echoed this appraisal, and both said that Sunnis, by sheer numbers, dominate the landscape and constitute, if nothing else, a numeric centre or mainstream. The following account of the first meeting of what would later become the Coalition appears to validate Lewis's, Yaqoob's, and Yusuf's perspectives that some members of the community believe that there is a norm that would emanate from a mainstream of the Muslim community. Four of the people I interviewed reported variations of this event. This particular rendition was particularly rich in detail and emotion:

> *The question that immediately arose is that this is supposed to be a Muslim organization; now let us debate who are Muslims. And nobody directly questioned that there were non-Muslims in the group, nobody directly questioned, but there was sufficient inferences. . . . And when it's directed at you, I mean, you see the vibes of it, and at that point I questioned—I don't think I was the only one who questioned—I said, "What is the definition of a Muslim? The definition of a Muslim is anybody who believes in the oneness of Allah [God] and believes that Mohammed is the last prophet." That is it. I mean, you have to accept it at its face value. You don't have the capacity, neither are you required by religion, to delve into the hearts of people to find out. . . . Anyway, the meeting ended without any specific resolution. . . . Then the next meeting was held. . . . Apparently those views that were expressed in an implicit way in the first meeting were then explicitly discussed. And the view, as far as I understand, was that, if it was going to be a Muslim organization, we did not want [certain groups] to be part of this group. . . . You could see that there was an element within the Muslim group that had a certain interpretation of what Islam is all about and they were trying to sort of force that at that stage.* (Yaqoob, 69-107)

This debate continued into the second meeting and threatened to truncate the embryonic coalition. When I asked what happened to those people who had, as Yusuf said, *"pointed their fingers"* (64), Yaqoob told me that, between the second and third exploratory meeting, there was a *"filtration process"* (108) and that those who wished to exclude some on the basis of their sectarian affiliation were not invited to attend subsequent meetings. (I will address this process as part of a discussion on leadership in Chapter 5.) The participants' assessment of this move was that it was either praiseworthy (four respondents) or it was not mentioned. However, Lewis observed that *"you can't have it all if you include some people, you exclude others"* (146). This raises an interesting point: When the group decided to establish more porous boundaries, it served to marginalize the group that was advocating for rigid boundaries. Ironically, porosity itself poses a barrier to those who cannot bear it while garnering the appreciation of those who would have been excluded. This move signalled a desire on the part of the

numerically dominant group to transcend sectarian divisions that can disintegrate into debates on what constitutes authenticity or the essential Muslim.

Within these newly established, if broader, boundaries, there is still an undercurrent of uncertainty about how to speak of contested understandings of identity. The participants flagged various incidents or issues that represent the ongoing negotiations over what constitutes being a Muslim or whether it can ever be described for once and for all. An example of this involved the appointment of an individual to what was perceived to be a particularly sensitive directorship. The concern was that in this position it might be possible for the new director to privilege one form of Muslim identification that was perceived by some to be at odds with what they consider to be the dominant view of it. This issue was resolved by asking those with concerns to address them to the appointee in question. Although the appointment went ahead, the incident speaks to the existence of essentialist notions of identity and a commitment on the part of some of the leadership to resist this pull towards essentialism. This tension betrays a belief on the part of some that there are more and less authentic representations of the identity of Muslim. This was corroborated by Miriam, who reported:

> *Within my own community there's a hesitation to accept me as a Muslim because they have other ideas or specific ideas or notions about what that might be. . . . So sometimes I must admit, when I open my mouth around that table, I think there are people who look and say or are thinking, Yeah, well, that's because you're not really a Muslim, a practicing Muslim. That's why you see it that way or think that way. So then I guess we do have different ideas about what Islam is and what it is to be a Muslim.* (297-302)

Miriam's comments indicate that there are many ways of being marginalized and that they are not based only on sectoral affiliation. In Miriam's case it is a lack of adherence to what might be considered orthodoxy, which has resulted in her feelings of

marginalization. Miriam suspected that other coalition members do not view her as a practicing Muslim, which places her authenticity under question. She felt that this impacts the weight that her ideas carry. In her last sentence she offered an insight into her own views of the identity of Muslim in her contention that there are many ways of expressing the identity Muslim.

Issues Related to Representative Practices, Multiplicity, and the Coalition

The Coalition has gestured towards the recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of Muslim identities by acknowledging that representational practices need to reflect the identities of their various members. This first became an issue when the Coalition was asked to provide a public institution with information on the Muslim community in Edmonton:

> *The police have asked for information about Muslims. We looked at what [another Muslim organization] has produced, and I know I had concerns, and several other people have had concerns. [Mo] expressed concerns with it, and guess what we've decided? We're going to write our own . . . because the way some things are portrayed does not represent the present diversity.* (Amin, 491-494)

Amin was making the point that public relations and public education materials sometimes reflect a narrow and partisan view of who Muslims are. The partisanship is often based on membership in a particular sect, but it also signals essentialism. Obviously this is of concern to those who are excluded by the representative practice, but it is also of concern to those who wish to resist the temptation to essentialize. Thus, even though Mo (another member of the board) and Amin are from different sects, they both see this as an issue that requires redress. Amin suggested that the Coalition has to achieve congruence between its membership and how it represents the faces of Muslims. For the Coalition to reflect the heterogeneity within its membership, its materials must do the

same. People need to see themselves reflected in their organization, including the documents that it produces. This requires that the group discuss not only the 'how to's' but also the 'what ifs.' The how to's refer to the processes that the group will use to engage with their understandings of identity, including what members think constitutes authenticity. And second, they will have to take into account that any decisions that they make about the boundaries of the identity will have repercussions. The latter point refers back to Lewis's comments about not being able to have it all. If identity ceases to be an essentialist proposition, then the essentialists feel threatened. For those who construe identity as fixed, reified, and metaphysically essential, these constructed representations of identity as fluid are uncomfortable and even problematic. For Amin, Anwar, and others, it is a pragmatic solution to a strategic issue.

The suggestion that there are Muslim identit*ies* as opposed to *a* Muslim identity requires careful negotiation and is sometimes a painfully difficult task, but it is necessary if people are going to be able to see themselves within the Coalition. How does an information booklet represent, for example, that some think that very particular forms of dress are mandated, whereas others do not think so? In the case of women and *hijab*, the Coalition chose to represent the varying beliefs present in the community by saying that:

> Islam teaches both men and women to dress modestly. Typically, *hijab* refers specifically to a headscarf worn by many female Muslims. Traditions and societal norms influence modest dress in various cultures. (05 DOC, p. 11)

Some participants, such as Amin, Martin, and Sarah, expressed strong support for this representation, which is now widely circulated by the Coalition; however, according to Lewis and Yusuf the Coalition's position on *hijab* that it is subject to the particular requirements of sectarian and cultural dictates could have negative repercussions:

> *So, for example, in terms of* hijab, *if the [Coalition] refuses to say that* hijab *is a part of the religion, is mandatory, or says that, no, it is not mandatory or that there are differences of opinion, then what does that do to a woman who is wearing* hijab*? She just lost basically her only recourse. So the law says that if it's a religion, you're allowed to wear it. No employer can fire her because of that. And if we've taken that . . . away from her because we can't agree, then we've compromised her ability to act on her beliefs. So that's the challenge now: How do we communicate that difference without jeopardizing her?* (Yusuf, 296-303)

The first part of Yusuf's comment contains at least two points of interest. First, what is the role of the Coalition regarding making pronouncements of a religious nature? Comparing this to Anwar's comments in the section on motivations, we see two differing perspectives. On the one hand, according to Anwar, this coalition is a political and advocacy body whose members identify with a particular religion. Yusuf, on the other hand, seems to signal in this quotation some desire for the Coalition to venture into commentary on religious doctrine. The reason that he believes that this is necessary is to protect the rights of women who wear *hijab* or *hijabis*. Without straying into a conversation on the validity of that claim, staying with the concept of identity, his observations suggest that there is only one way to represent this matter of practice. In the Coalition's attempt to represent a multiplicity of ways of *practicing*, its capacity to represent one particular group of Muslims, *hijabis*, has been called into question. Lewis offered a similar observation: *"Well, if [the Coalition] says we don't think it[*hijab*] is mandatory, then a lot of people could see [the Coalition] not protecting their community and basic tenets of the faith. . . . That could be a show stopper"* (206-208). Although the legal implications of these remarks are beyond the scope of this study and were not the object of research, from the perspective of identity, hegemony, and privilege, these statements emphasize a point that Lewis had made earlier. The more porous that identity

boundaries become and the more essentialisms are subverted, the more uncomfortable that becomes for those whose understanding of identity is essentialist. Conversely, the more that identity is essentialized and the more rigorously that the boundaries of an identity are policed, the less viable that coalition work is and the more that Muslim *Others* are marginalized or excluded from the community. Yusuf's and Lewis' comments also reveal that there are still implicit norms in operation among some of the Coalition's membership.

Yet in *Towards Understanding Muslims in Canada* [*TUMIC*], the complexity of the identity of Muslim is clearly acknowledged:

> The Muslim community in Edmonton in particular reflects this rich diversity, which has been a historical reality within Islam over its 1,400 years of existence. The plurality of its cultures, ethnicities and *religious traditions* [italics added] is beyond the scope of this booklet. Thus, the basic beliefs, rituals and practices within the ethnically and culturally rich Muslim community are briefly outlined. (O5 DOC, p. 3)

This acknowledgement is also in the *Terms of Reference and By-Laws* (02 DOC), which state that one of its core values is to "Recognize, honour and value diversity (racial, cultural, and linguistic, etc.)" (p. 2). Perhaps the vague and parenthetical references to what constitutes diversity are indicative of the Coalition's own ambivalence about complexity, fluidity, and its meaning for the identity of Muslim.

Internal Practices and Multiplicity

A more recent document entitled *Strengthening the Coalition* (10 DOC) signals the first direct formal acknowledgement of the challenges of working across significant identity differences. It flags the presence of contestations of identity, and references the "narrow understanding of Islam" (p. 2) as a challenge. It also identifies the need to "establish process to enhance each director's understanding of our diversity" (p. 1). In

this document the Coalition appears to have recognized that identify differences require engagement. Sarah validated the importance of making this move: *"One thing that I hoped would come out of all this is just a greater awareness. . . . That means understanding the various groups that call themselves Muslims"* (19-21).

Lewis's comments suggest that in fact the Coalition has been a catalyst for the type of awareness that Sarah spoke of and hoped for. He said that, by working together, the Coalition members have been

> *forced . . . to be more open and, I guess, more aware of the other. For example, I knew nothing about the Ismaili faith, and the Shi'a to a lesser degree, but that's an important barrier to come down in both directions.* (276-280)

However, the barrier will not come down by virtue of propinquity alone. The lessons of the information booklet, the media event, the first meeting, and the contestation of a minority sect member's appointment to the chair of a sensitive portfolio all illustrate that deeply held beliefs about identity and authenticity continue to shape intragroup relations.

One participant's reflections on the subject represent his struggle to find a way to be true to what he considers to be his Islamic principles while he remains in the service of the Coalition:

> *So[we] haven't really got that far yet in terms of a broader Muslim community because of the differences of culture and the differences of understanding the faith. And differences in priorities—we have different priorities in the Muslim community, but I see that it is coming slowly.* (Jamal, 92-96)

> *And to me, it has to come back to the faith. . . . If I'm face[d] with a problem I take it back to the faith, to what my faith says or what my principles say and I'll make a decision based on that. So you are talking to a person who said "I want to wear two hats, business hat and an Islam hat," and . . .. things [are] going to conflict,. . . and then we have people that . . . only wear one hat, have other people only wearing the educational hat, . . . the political hat. Then that becomes a challenge. And you can see it . . . when we get to that point .[We are] very*

> *cautious and careful about everything, . . . and that's why we don't act in a very fast way, very, very slow.* (Jamal, 143-154)

In Jamal's estimation, the progress on some fronts is very slow for two reasons. First is the perceived need for caution to develop the leadership's capacity to accommodate different priorities related to identity differences. According to Jamal, this means that the Coalition has been reluctant to transmit what its members have learned about multiplicity to the grassroots. This has hindered, he said, the speed at which the group has been able to move on some issues because the Coalition does not want to get too far in front of its communities. He offered this not as a criticism, but as an observation that when so much is at stake, both personally and collectively, the tendency is to exercise great caution.

Jamal also spoke about the challenges of working with so many differences because, although for some people differences are just interesting variations, for him (and others) they represent fundamentally irreconcilable gaps in belief and practice:

> *Q: Do you think there's some differences that will never be enfolded? . . . Are there some kinds of differences that just don't fit in that picture?*
> *J: There are, there are differences that are fundamental. And that's why . . . they don't get touched, but that's why it might pose a problem in the future. Again, if we can continue to work around the positive . . . .*
> *Q: You hope that sometime it might be safe to talk about those things? Or it won't matter any more?*
> *J: No, it will; it will matter, because the person who wears the faith hat—it's important . . . to come back to that—this person, I think, is going to protect their hat, to have space to talk about that in the future.*

In this exchange Jamal was pointing out that, for some, their faith carries a foundational and perhaps immutable set of principles, but, eventually, fluidity and notions of identities as open to contestation will bump up against the faith of those who believe that there is an essential Muslim. When that happens—and he asserted that it will inevitably happen—then the best outcome will be to create an environment in which it is safe to

take up these issues. Although Miriam's identification as a Muslim is very different from Jamal's, her views are not dissimilar:

> *But there is always the "Well, what are we going to say? And how are we going to explain Islam? And what if someone says the wrong thing? And what if someone says 'You don't have to wear* hijab*' and that'll offend the other [Coalition] member who believes you have to wear* hijab*?" So we end up saying nothing, and I think that is kind of interesting. . . . Maybe the political place is the only place they feel safe going.* (151-159)

Marion observed that in the face of some of these tensions, the Coalition's method of dealing with them has been to say nothing directly and to continue to move and comment in those areas that she identified as political, where there is agreement. However, as Lewis's and Yusuf's earlier comments clearly suggested, these issues are interconnected, and in chapter 5 I will discuss and critique avoidance as a means of dealing with differences.

Section Summary

The theme on dichotomy and multiplicity demonstrates that once the walls of essentialism are breached and identity as concept loses fixity, there follows a kind of questioning about what it might mean to call oneself a Muslim and what Muslims hold in common. For some this is an effort in intellectual reflection, whereas for others it threatens a worldview that is foundational not just to ideas, but also to action. Admitting to the possibility of Muslim identification as complex, contested, and contextual is viewed as opening a world of possibility and presenting a world of uncertainty and even reduced safety.

The impact of this split between dichotomy and multiplicity has challenged the Coalition to develop representative practices that try to honour a range of identifications. But in its refusal to engage in pronouncements beyond its political and educational

mandate, questions continue to arise in the minds of some members. Is *hijab* mandated or not? Are there five or three daily prayers? Do Muslims celebrate the Prophet's birthday or not? What is startling about the way that the participants addressed these questions is the dichotomy between multiplicity and essentialism. It remains to be seen how *this* type of conceptual contestation—between essentialism and non-essentialism—can be represented in procedural, promotional, and educational documents.

For those who are shaping the identity question in sets of mutual exclusivity, the broader and more porous the identity boundaries become, the more dangerous it becomes. However, for others—those who were initially among those threatened with exclusion and those who identify as being more secular—porosity is safety, minimizing the probability of expulsion from the group. In this moment between porosity and boundedness in this space of neither/nor, of liminality, rests the possibility of so many fertile conversations that could give birth to a "coalition[s] across difference" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 2). In this moment of great possibility it appears that the Coalition is holding its breath. Its internal practices for responding to the demands of such complicated and potentially explosive dialogues are yet emergent, but 5 of the 10 participants I interviewed clearly called for developing a means of safely and respectfully engaging with these issues, with the caveat that the process must not sabotage the necessary work of the group. Ultimately, regardless of their views on identity and difference, all 10, to greater or lesser extents, believe that the Coalition is making a positive contribution to the well-being of the Muslim community in Edmonton.

Chapter Summary

Reagon's (2000) essay, "Turning the Century," evokes the visceral realities of coalition work. Taking that work as a guide, I have endeavoured to convey the dissonances, disturbances, tensions, and harmonies present in the voices of the research participants. The primary focus of this chapter was to surface the kinds of identities and differences that have come to comprise the Coalition and on revealing how those I interviewed understand their own and others' complex identities. I have also discussed the different motivators that have caused those I interviewed to become involved in coalition work—work that is much more challenging than working within a more homogeneous group.

I began the chapter by describing some of the general characteristics of the participants. The need to attend to sensitivities regarding identifiability necessitated painting a picture of the group rather than of individuals. In spite of the limitations on how demographic information can be shared, their many identities, even presented as they are, begin to suggest the kinds of differences that the Coalition needs to negotiate. As well, this extraordinary attention to protecting identities also arises out of the sometimes fragile nature of coalitions in which differences and common ground are often in precarious balance and differences remain a potential threat to group cohesion. In such environments careful attention to process is necessary to nurture trust. It is important that this study not pre-empt the natural progression of the group by forcing conversations before the whole group is ready.

In the second section the participants talked about their reasons for becoming and staying involved with the Coalition. They identified four types of motivators; bridge

building among Muslim communities, resistance to the effects of racialization, integration into Canadian society, and the power of a collective voice—the need for cohesion. Five of the 10 participants appeared to have one overriding reason for becoming involved in the group, whereas the remaining five members had between two and four reasons for wanting to become involved in the Coalition. For the two participants whose motivations were less aligned with the group's agenda, there appears to be a correlation between their dissatisfaction with the group and the alignment between their sole motivation and group's priorities.

The most interesting finding was that bridge building among Muslim communities was as strong a motivator as resisting the effects of racialization. The desire to learn about other Muslims; to redress divisions that result from religious history, colonial intervention, and insularity; and to end competitiveness were most often cited as reasons for wanting to strengthen relations with other communities. Participants' willingness to state that these divisions exist and to commit energy towards breaching these gaps bodes well for this coalition. However, there was a tension within this motivational domain between a competing desire to erase difference and the desire to seek to understand how relations of power are mediated through them and how to address those relations of power. Understanding and respecting these differences will also have an impact on the group's capacity to achieve other goals embedded in their motivations, to have a common voice, and to have that voice heard in the halls of power as well as by ordinary Canadian citizens.

Some of the participants were less optimistic about the Coalition's capacity to match its efforts with their motivations. Jamal and Miriam were not sure whether there

was sufficient overlap between their personal motivations and the political goals of the group. The issue of multiple agendas within coalitions requires attention. The privileging of some agendas over others is often about efficiency or limited resources, but ensuring transparency in how decisions are made and allowing people whose agendas are not privileged to speak about their concerns is an important aspect of coalition building. Clearly, identity has played a role in negotiating membership in the Coalition, and it is important for the group to continue to explore how identity continues to shape their relations and their collective agendas.

In the final section, Who Can Define a Proper Muslim? I explored three themes. In the first theme the participants spoke to the uneasy alliance between those who have a dichotomous view of what constitutes Muslim identity and those who view the identity as taking any number of possible forms and as having greater and lesser degrees of fluidity. The meaning of this uneasy alliance for representative practices was the focus of the second theme. Some participants viewed the depictions of Muslim identities as variations on a theme, as intersected, interrupted, and modified by culture, class, gender, and so forth, as a fair compromise, whereas others saw these representations as compromising identity integrity. The last theme upon which the participants reflected was how multiplicity and essentialism can be negotiated in this coalition. On this issue there was consensus that the Coalition will need to move slowly on this.

Although there are tensions within the Coalition that have arisen from the multiple understandings of what it means to be a Muslim, the group is trying to attend to what Mohanty (and Anwar) advised: to focus on the political issues that arise out of the racialization of the community rather than build a common identification as Muslims.

However, there are strong attachments to essentialisms and to multiplicity. Paradoxically, porosity feels invalidating for essentialists, and essentialism excludes those whose identification is non-essentialist in nature. How this coalition is engaging across this significant gap is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5:

"SOMETIMES IT'S POSITIVE, SOMETIMES IT'S . . . SCARY": NEGOTIATING IDENTITY DIFFERENCE IN COALITIONS

Introduction

As the title of this chapter suggests, negotiating identity differences is challenging. The title uses a line from Jamal's interview in which he referred to his emotional response to the sometimes requisite bracketing of passions or beliefs to forward a strategic goal of the group. Jamal's and others' experiences of their own and others' identity differences provide important insights into the need for coalitions to develop strategies and processes for acknowledging how differences are qualified and performed. This chapter seeks to explore three questions. How does differentiation occur within the coalition? What subjectivities have become identified as differences? Finally, what processes do coalitions use to negotiate these differences?

Within an essentialist framework differences become reified and objectified. Therefore their potency as a means of circumscribing relationships and delimiting identity boundaries is significant. Hall's (1997) use of the term *classificatory* to describe one form of differentiation is helpful in making sense of how subjectivities become identified as different. Classificatory ordering by subjectivity situates certain subjectivities within or outside of broad categories of identity. Belonging to or exclusion from the category is predicated upon the performance or absence of these subjectivities. For example, in the identity category of Muslim, sects are not always viewed as sub*categories* but are construed as constituting an outside to an essentialist Muslim inside because of the presence or absence of particular subjectivities or characteristics or

practices. These qualities that form the basis of classification become constructed and understood to constitute difference for those who are 'outside' the identity category.

Sometimes differentiation occurs in a binary formation. In Orientalism we saw that occident and orient have been discursively produced to constitute each as the binary opposite of the other. A binary is in an inverse relation to its Other, a relationship that is representative of the possession or lack of qualities that themselves are valued or reviled. One half of the binary is in possession of the valued qualities (hence their power), whereas the other is in possession of an inverse set of qualities that are reviled (hence powerlessness or lack of value).

The first section of this chapter examines the way in which difference is talked about and understood. The participants used three concepts to express their understandings of difference: the liberal multicultural, classificatory, and binary. They also reveal in their comments about difference some important ambivalences about 'what to do' with difference.

In the second section I present the ways in which these differences are negotiated. The participant interviews surfaced five strategies that the Coalition employs to cope with difference: strong leadership, consensus, compromise, bracketing, and education. I also present some comments from the participants that reflect their desire to work towards talking more openly and dialogically about difference, and these comments conclude this chapter.

How Coalition Members Talk and Think About Difference

Listening to the reflections of the participants, I was struck by two facets of their discussions of difference that translate into the main themes for this section. The first

theme examines the ways that those I interviewed seemed to understand difference at the conceptual level. What I mean by *conceptual* is how the participants seemed to be differentiating identities. Views of difference range from the liberal multicultural to binary and classificatory constructions of difference. The presence of these various understandings of difference raises interesting tensions and surfaces issues of import regarding the negotiation of difference at the level of both the conceptual and the particular. The issue of negotiation is taken up in the next section of the chapter.

The second theme relates to ambivalence and certainty. Some of the conversations reflect the participants' conflicting responses to difference, which suggests feelings of ambivalence about what to do with the obvious differences that prevail within this coalition. What should a coalition actually *do* with differences? Are they ignored? Are they engaged? Acknowledged as irrelevant and transcended? Acknowledged as important and bracketed for some later discussion? Most of those I interviewed hold multiple positions, some of which are in tension. One set of tensions reflects the perceived need to engage difference in some way as well as a fear of the consequences of doing so, which indicates both attraction and repulsion to the prospect of engaging directly with difference. The other set of tensions is the desire to see difference as irrelevant while believing that they need to be engaged with in a dialogic way, which to me suggests that they are, in fact, not irrelevant.

Understandings of the Concept of Difference

Three types of essentialist understandings of identity difference operated in these conversations: liberal multicultural, classificatory, and binary. Each one of these is discussed in the subsections that follow. An examination of the various understandings of

difference and how they operate within the Coalition serves to highlight the real dilemmas that face a group that is enfolding some considerable differences even as it acts on behalf of what is considered one identity category. What follows are many of the participants' multiple and sometimes contested understandings of what difference means for belonging and exclusion.

Liberal Multicultural Understandings of Difference

Liberal multicultural notions speak to an understanding of differences as benign or beneficial in nature. In this framework differences are referred to as *diversity*. Recalling Boler and Zembylas's (2003) typology of liberal notions of difference, the participants in this study seemed to focus on the celebratory myth of difference and the "same under the skin" myth (p. 113). The former was invoked via a Qur'anic passage, which thus imbued it with divine authority. Amin, Anwar, Miriam, Nadia, and Sarah articulated this view, with variations, to describe both the Muslim community at large and their hopes for the composition of the Coalition. Sarah viewed difference not only as a gift, but also as an object lesson:

> *I really do believe in the one creator, and we're all His children, and yet there's all this diversity. But that's what it's all about. It's how do you sort of, not overcome, but, I mean, there's a reason why there are different ethnicities and groups—it would be pretty boring if everybody was the same—and I think it's to help us learn and to get past that and to be accepting, to be more accepting as opposed to tolerant.* (184-188)

The conceptualization of difference that Sarah employs suggests that differences are a divine gift which is consistent with a particular *sura* (49:13) in the Qur'an often used to mitigate exclusions based on difference. Nadia and Anwar also referred to this passage directly and indirectly. In part this *sura* reads, *"O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you unto nations and tribes, so that you may*

come to know one another" (05 DOC, p. 1). Sarah's views of difference are also consistent with liberal multicultural notions of difference that tend to sidestep issues of power. Her desire not to judge differences as good or bad leaves unexamined how power is currently mediated through difference, or even how some of her own subjectivities might privilege her within the Coalition.

For Miriam,

> *being a Muslim, then I have to be able to see God in everyone and everything. That's what it means, for me to be able to see everything as a manifestation of the Creator or the divine. And once I see it all that way, then it's really hard to say some of it's okay and some of it's not okay. If this is all because of or created by the Creator, then how can some of it be good and some of it be bad?* (275-280)

There is a yearning for equality, for the cessation of privilege and exclusion on the basis of difference in the reflections of both Miriam and Sarah. I read their statements (and those similar to theirs) as a critique of essentialism, but not necessarily a call for an anti-essentialist interrogation of how power works through identity and identity differences.

Anwar had a perspective similar to Miriam's: *"Creation is difference. So difference is a bad word? . . . Totally opposite: Difference is something that we are blessed with"* (429-430). Nadia and Amin echoed the divine and blessed nature of difference. Yet they all acknowledged that difference, in spite of its divine origins, can cause divisions or exclusions.

Classificatory Understandings of Difference

The second type of differentiation that manifested in the participants' comments was classificatory. Although at times the language that identifies the characteristics used to classify was obvious (such as sectarian terminologies or gender), at other times it appeared that terms were being used as a kind of code to demarcate difference. I

understood some of these words and phrases as euphemisms for a particular difference, whereas other terms seemed to signal the quality of the difference (i.e., problematic or challenging). Some of the euphemisms for difference include understandings, beliefs, idiosyncrasies, views, and sensitive or tricky issues. I interpret the use of these types of words as signalling tenderness around the issues in particular as well as a concern for the capacity of this coalition to withstand a head-on engagement with them. However, there is little doubt that these 'sensitivities' play a role in how identities are sorted and sometimes ranked.

Two subjectivities that came up in the interviews most often were orthodoxy and sect. Of course, there is no broad agreement on how to identify people by sect or orthodoxy. The idea of both sect and orthodoxy are constructions, as are any attempts to circumscribe them according to various identity characteristics. There was also a noticeable lack of attention to what these classifications mean in terms of relations of power.

Orthodoxy as a classificatory difference. I use the term *orthodoxy* to refer to the way that some members of the Coalition described how Muslims interpret religious practice (Figure 1). Several people alluded to the existence of *fringes* or *extremes* and *mainstream* or *middle ground*, terms that have no fixed meaning but which are meaningful to some. I had a sense that there was a negative or problematic quality associated with the fringes, whereas the centre, middle, or mainstream appears to represent a kind of moderation or reasonableness or majoritarian position. I use this scheme to explain how those who use this framework appear to understand it. It is important to note that there is no actual Muslim lexicon of terms to which this

corresponds; this appears to be language that is used in this context to gesture towards what are perceived to be less orthodox elements within the community. Note that some consider both the 'strict' and the 'secular' to belong to the fringes.

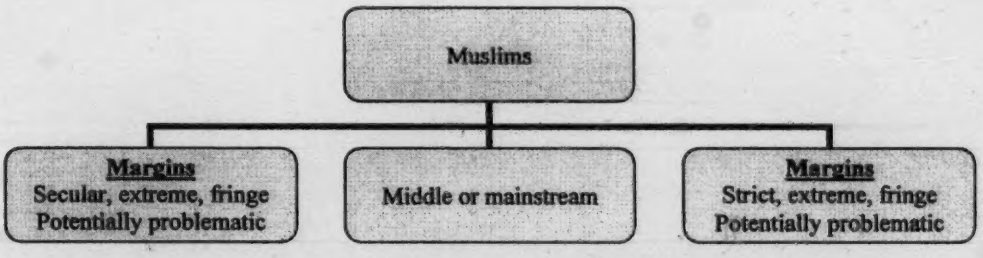

Figure 1. Visual depiction of how some members of the Coalition understand orthodoxy.

It was clear from his comments that Anwar privileges the middle: *"One thinks that Islam should be this way, this extreme; one thinks that Islam should be to that extreme; and [other] people say it should be the middle."* (365). Anwar was careful not to identify specific people or types of people as being extreme, although those on the extremes seem to ascribe to dichotomies, in Anwar's view. The extremes, he seemed to be saying, cannot get along with one another: *"So my job is—so especially when I came to be [in a leadership position], I say, 'Okay, let's pull these extreme to the middle.' At the end of the day at least I did my best"* (475-477). He believes that this role and perhaps that of the Coalition is to convince those on the extreme to give up that position and adopt the accommodating view of the middle ground. In his view, this is the space where consensus and compromise lead to political activism and unity of purpose. In another part of our conversation he said, *"We work on what we agree"* (501), this means that the divisive bits have to be bracketed in order to get the job done. Anwar was one of three

who did not talk about the need for some sort of dialogue to engage in difference unless it is to pull the *extremes* to the centre.

The inclusion of the *fringes* can be problematic with respect to alienating those who regard the fringe as inauthentic:

> *You can minimize a majority view by—I'm not saying this is wrong but we encountered it a little bit— . . . including all of the fringes. You can sort of marginalize or minimize some of the core values, I think, that are probably, maybe more representative, I guess, of the overall community.* (Lewis, 152-155)

There is a great deal going on in this comment. The relative merit of the fringe is clear in Lewis's categorizing of those values as non-core. This ranking of values coupled with the representation of the majority as holding a centre that is more legitimate serves to create an unmistakable classification system wherein the margins (he did not seem to distinguish whether the secular or strict fringes are more or less problematic) are less valid than the mainstream. These differences are not benign but flag privilege and authenticity.

What is not particularly clear is that these terms mean the same thing to everybody, which may lead to dissonance among Coalition members regarding what are considered to be problematic fringe beliefs and practices and what are mainstream or core. Of course, the terms still indicate the presence of solid lines of distinction. The identity, *n[illegible]us* that is the fringe helps to identify the identity of *us* that is at the centre. Characteristics that are used to classify and identity as majority or centre are said to be *core* or *fundamental* characteristics.

Although Anwar's and Lewis's ideas appear to differ regarding who is on the fringe and who is within the mainstream, both of their analyses seem to preclude blurring lines among these categories of Muslims. Anwar's statement about needing to bring those

on the fringes to the middle and Lewis's statement about those on the fringes not holding core values suggest that individuals belong in one place or the other. How can a person, in the frameworks that Anwar and Lewis outlined, occupy both positions since they appear to be mutually excluding categories? To be on the fringe is to be either *not moderate* or not in the majority.

According to Anwar, a person can move out of a category, not because members cease to patrol the boundaries of it, but because individuals change their beliefs or practices to fit into another category. The very things that constitutes these categories are their differences; thus the maintenance of the boundaries simultaneously constitutes the maintenance of identity. In the Coalition this form of differentiation has the potential to establish some voices as more and less powerful. The voices from the fringe are seen as problematic and troublesome from Anwar's perspective, and from Lewis's they are less authentic, or challenge the right of the authentic Muslim to shape policy and practice. Anwar's middle ground is replete with compromise and porosity while Lewis' authentic majority demarcates the limits of the identity. In their own way each is yearning for a space in which dissent does not rupture coalitional unity. But coalitions are not the barred room of comfort; they are by nature sites of contestation.

Sects as the sites of classificatory differences. Another sorting of Muslims happens along sectarian lines (Table 5). All members of the Coalition fall under the general heading of *Muslim*, but there are differences in practice that arise from the varying interpretations of history and scripture among the three sects within the Coalition. These are understood to distinguish one from the other. While incomplete this schema indicates the kind of sorting that the participants discussed. This scheme is not

intended to reflect any formal or universal set of criteria, but serves to highlight some of the issues with which this coalition has had to deal.

Table 5

Schema for Understanding Perceived Sectarian Difference

	Sect		
Differences in practice	Sunni	Shi'a	Ismaili
Daily prayer	5 times/day	5 prayers; timing is different from Sunnis	3 times a day
Shahada	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abraham's (PBUH) sacrifice	Asked to sacrifice son Ishmael	Asked to sacrifice son Ishmael	Asked to sacrifice son Isaac
Hijab	Some	Yes	No

That this production of difference through naming and sorting is not always void of ranking or valuing is reflected in Lewis' comments below. He recounted the process of writing *TUMIC*:

> *A: So when we were writing the [*TUMIC*] book, we weren't able to write five daily prayers to make sure that everyone was [included], but that is the overwhelming opinion, probably 98 or 99%. . . . So that's some of the juggling act. . . . So we put multiple daily prayers to get around it, but it did kind of* water it down, *I guess, one of the* key tenets. [emphasis added] *So it's not the end of the world, I guess, but it's just, you certainly have to be aware of where difficulties can arise. . . . I mean, we were sort of able to get around it by saying multiple daily prayers.*
> *Q: And people were comfortable with that?*
> *A: Well, there were some people who weren't terribly pleased, but once . . . consensus had arrived, then that was that. . . . There may be an issue one day where that'll happen, where, very similar to the five daily prayers, you've got a* basic tenet [emphasis added] *of the faith that can't be agreed upon. . . . [It] will be a problem if you can't get consensus.* (Lewis, 158-188)

Striking features of this text are the phrases "water it down," "key tenets," and "basic tenet." What Lewis seems to have suggested is that there are unassailable and essential tenets or practices that somehow determine a common or core practices or forms of identification. This does indeed read like essentialism. It also implies that other sects are not only distinct, but also somehow less authentic. This form of differentiation that classifies categorical belonging according to practice appears to suggest that both power and privilege are attached to some forms of identification. The majority is not only numerically dominant, but also the holders of the fundamental truth. If this is the case and if the Coalition continues to view itself as predicated on an identity rather than a set of social conditions (racialization, human rights violations, discriminatory stereotyping, etc.), then the Coalition runs the risk of encountering the kind of deadlock that Lewis predicted.

This type of differentiating renders the issue of representation more problematic. Clearly, there was no consensus on the appropriateness of the compromise that enabled the writing of *TUMIC*; it appears that some people were not happy with it. If they were in the minority, it further confuses who is constructing the problematic differences. It was not a problem for the majority of the Coalition members even though Lewis's statement implies that the majority's beliefs were watered down. This begs the question, is there some other subjectivity that intersects with sect to interpret this compromise differently? Is it possible that orthodoxy and sect sometimes operate together to create another kind of identity difference and surface another set of tensions?

How multiple subjectivities intersect and interrupt one another also contributes to how identity differences are understood and engaged with. So for some who pray five

times a day is acceptable to represent Muslim daily prayers as multiple, yet for others this is problematic because the notion of prayerfulness is not contingent but essential. In my interview with Anwar he referred to this as intrasect complexity. He said that within each sect there were those on the fringes and those in the middle, which means, according to my schema in the previous section, that there will be Sunnis, for example, who are more and less oriented towards the *margins* of practice. These constructed classifications, if they become or are perceived to be reified, make it difficult to forge consensus or find common ground or find Anwar's middle way.

Gender and Binary Differences

Binary differences are less predominant within the Coalition. However, the one binary that that appears to hold currency with some members is a gendered binary. It is difficult with only the data at hand to fully describe the nature of the binary, especially because the references to it were oblique. What did emerge is that some see women as situated very differently from men. The commentary circled around gender difference in various guises: *hijab*, differences in women's roles within the Coalition, and the degree to which women in this coalition are accepted as having equal voice and power. I need to emphasize that the identity of Muslim woman is both a complex and a contested identity. There is no singular set of differentiations that mark this subjectivity. There is no universal Muslim woman. This identity is as complex a gendered identity as that of any woman, anywhere.

I am also conscious that it is important to approach this subject with care. As both Mohanty (2003) and Razack (2004) pointed out, a great deal of racism has been perpetrated under the guise of liberating the Muslim woman. Muslim women and their

bodies (often under the pretext of the issue of *hijab* or *Sharia*) have been one battleground upon which the West has engaged the East. I do not wish to reproduce such gendered racism here, nor do I wish to essentialize and reify Muslim women by suggesting that there is such an ossified category to which they/we all belong. However, it is obvious that this particular identity difference is contested in this particular context. What I mean is that how it ought to be performed, what constitutes authentic performance, and the capacity for porosity regarding this identity are not agreed upon and are in tension among Coalition members. In this subsection I examine how the subjectivity of *woman* is talked about within the context of the Coalition.

When the Coalition was first soliciting the participation of other organizations, it identified the need to include women's perspectives. In his interview Anwar said, *"We need a women's organization to balance things, so let's invite [the Women's Organization]"* (10). He did not elaborate upon the word *balance*, so it is hard to say what he meant by it. One assumes that it is men whom women will balance out, that there are some gaps that require the attention of Muslim women. This invitation predated the formal organization, and women were therefore part of the visioning workshops that produced the mission and vision statements for the group. During those workshops there was some dissent regarding the participation of women. According to Yaqoob, *"He [the dissenter] raised the issue of whether the participation of women in the group was appropriate, so he [the chairperson] put an end to that[the dissent]"* (177-178). This attempt to impose a gendered binary was interrupted by the leadership of the time. *Appropriate* is synonymous with *proper* or *correct*, so we can assume that the impropriety of women working alongside men in a public space was the perspective of at

least one member. That his opinion was not validated does not mean that those views cease to be held, nor does it mean that the implications for relations of power implied in such a binary construction (men-public/women-private) were addressed or challenged. I will discuss the method of dealing with differences in the second half of this chapter.

Although women were always part of the Coalition because of the women's organization that is part of the council, other member organizations were under no obligation to send women as their representatives. During a regular meeting held in the summer of 2005, which I was observing for this study, a recommendation was made to amend a recruitment letter sent to member organizations that requested that they consider making one of the two appointees a woman (Analysis OBS 4 #3). However, aside from one organization that sent a woman (who later resigned as a result of the pressures of her business), it does not appear to have had any impact on the recruitment of women.

In spite of these efforts to have more women on the council, there have been other contestations regarding their involvement:

> *The first VIP dinner at [the mosque] . . . one particular individual said, "I will not attend" as a director. Why? Because it's a mixed gathering. We tried to reach a compromise. . . . He said no, that was not good enough: "You either . . . divide the line and say women on that side, men this side." . . . So we debated it and said, "No, we cannot." For example, you've got [Ms. A], who is the president of [her organization], and she feels this is her opportunity to interact with leadership, and she comes and sits with us [men]. So we said, "No, we'll take a stand on this. If you feel uncomfortable, we'd rather you didn't attend," and he didn't.* (Yaqoob, 338-371)

This example of the contested place of women within the Coalition is also indicative of the identity differences that exist among Muslim women. There are women who would be more comfortable being in a segregated environment, and there are women who would not. What is interesting here, as in other examples in this and the previous chapter, is that

some people are not comfortable with porosity, with multiple ways of performing identity bumping up against one another. They have to be carefully separated. In this case it is men and women, which I read as Man/Woman, with Man occupying the dominant half of the binary. I think it is a salient feature of this conversation that it took place among men. Women were not involved in advocating for themselves in either instance of contestation. I do not mean to say that men cannot be allies in this advocacy, but I wonder why women are not using their own voices to speak out against this type of exclusion.

What are the women saying about women, identity, and difference? Nadia had a great deal to say about women's identities and women's roles, including her view that this particular coalition can serve as a potential catalyst for Muslim women to move into leadership positions. She had this to say about women and leadership:

> *Absolutely, absolutely. I can see the chair of [the Coalition] being a woman. I don't see that there should be any differences really. I don't think gender should play a role.. . . we've heard so much negativity about Muslims, about Islam in general, and we know that we don't have to go into it about the role that women play or the role that women don't play. And who is it telling us not to play that role? is what I'd like to know. Who tells us we can't play that role? Certainly the great Prophet didn't.* (169-175)

Nadia contended that gender differences should not necessitate inequity, nor should those differences become binaries in which women are seen as incapable or inappropriate to play leadership roles. She argued that some limitations or ascriptions of limitations are the result of gendered stereotypes, and she hinted that there may be Muslims who also believe that women cannot be leaders. Then she suggested that there is no basis in doctrine for any such claim. This sits in contrast with the director who contested the inclusion of women at the networking dinner. How do these two perspectives intersect

within the Coalition itself? I suspect from Nadia's comments that the issue of the dinner must never have been surfaced.

Compare Nadia's certainty with Yaqoob's counter certainty. This comment has to be read with some context. Yaqoob himself does not hold this view, but he referred to some notion of what the majority might think, although not, apparently, the majority of this council. Who is this majority?

> *[A woman in the Muslim community]is well connected politically, is resourceful, has sufficient credibility. . . . [But] I know it and Mo knows it, that the Muslim community will never accept her as a leader. How can you have a leader of a Muslim organization who does not observe* hijab*? How can you have leader of a Muslim community whose practices are at variance with the generally accepted Muslim practice?* (250-260)

How can these forms of differentiation be interrupted when it appears that they are not surfaced and interrogated? And what is it that keeps these issues from being discussed? The silence on this issue is perhaps more interesting that what is being said. Bannerji (2000) said that silence can be read as either resistance or complicity. Can I read this as resistance, as in a refusal to provide public space for the ethos that would relegate women to an insubordinate role to men? Or do I read this silence as complicity, another kind of refusal, the refusal to publicly confront or expose the relations of power that circulate through this gendered binary? Unless the concept of binary differences is analyzed and the issue of power is intersected with differentiation, the Coalition runs the risk of re-inscribing and reinforcing relations of power that situate men as dominant and women as subordinate, in spite of the intentions of some to ensure the very opposite.

Section Summary

The multiple responses to and understandings of identity differences constitute another facet of the identity-based challenges that a coalition faces. Regardless of the

Coalition's emphasis on maintaining a political rather than a religious focus, issues of faith and practice are clearly important to some members' understandings of identity. Those understandings shape individuals' attitudes towards one another, as well as policies and strategies.

At the beginning of this chapter I posed several questions, two of which I revisit here: How does differentiation occur within the coalition? What subjectivities have become identified as differences? The participants' comments and observations of coalition processes and policies identified three types of differentiating: liberal multicultural, classificatory, and binary. Common to all three is their power to obscure the way that difference can be constructed to privilege some over others. This happens in a liberal construct through the myth that difference is benign diversity or that it is illusory. With classificatory differentiation, it appears naturalistic; orders of identity are predicated upon what are perceived to be naturally occurring or self-chosen characteristics. Belonging to a category fixes a person in that place and, depending upon the context, situates identities as more or less powerful, more or less valuable, and more or less human.

Binary differences imply an ordering of identity pairs which are perceived to constitute the inverse of one another. In this case some situate gender relations in a binary. The Muslim Man/Muslim Woman binary, for *some*—and this must be emphasized—is a hierarchical ordering of relationships. However, there is silence on this issue that can be read in multiple ways and probably needs to be read in more than one way to account for the multiple perspectives on this issue, as reflected in the participants' views on the role of women in the Coalition.

Another dimension of the dynamics of differentiation is the efforts that this coalition has made to transgress identity boundaries and binaries, resisting calls for exclusion on the basis of sect and advocating for women as members, as directors, as public spokespersons, as well as key drafters of public policy and legal briefs. This has been most welcome and helpful to some: *"I used to think that Ismailis and Druze, . . . they're not really Muslims. But what's a real Muslim? Well, the reality is, you have all this diversity . . . in terms of various schools of thought"* (Sarah, 191-194); *"I don't know; I don't know what I call me any more, to tell you the truth; I don't know"* (Sarah, 209).

This softening of identity boundaries has been a part of Sarah's process of questioning the nature of identity. Identity differences cease to mark one as a member of the faithful or not, and practices are no longer fundamental and foundational. The concept of identity as reified and unitary has been interrupted, and Sarah no longer focuses on boundary maintenance to service her own identity. Labels used for sorting and authenticating pose a problem now with regard to the issue of identity differences. While some members of the Coalition recounted similar experiences, steps taken by the Coalition towards heterogeneity and fluidity are not necessarily received without concern. There are those for whom identity is a rock-solid and immutable foundation, and efforts to create acceptance for the legitimacy of other identities are greeted with ambivalence. The very thing that constitutes these categories is their differences; thus the maintenance of the boundaries simultaneously constitutes the maintenance of identity. This form of differentiation sets up in a coalition setting more and less powerful voices.

Ambivalence

Individual Coalition members as well as the Coalition as a whole are struggling with the nature of and the need for unity to be an effective advocate for Muslims. One set of tensions reflects the perceived need to engage in some way with the differences that exist among the membership, while at the same time there is cautiousness about where that might lead. The other tension is between the participants' desires to see difference as easily transcended or not relevant to their common cause and their belief that it is necessary to engage fully and deeply with their identity differences. In the final theme of this section I explore the participants' ambivalences, which together depict the Coalition's collective ambivalence regarding the nature of identity and identity differences.

I examine these tensions through the comments of three participants, Sarah, Jamal, and Yusuf, all of whom spoke at some length on this subject. I present each of their perspectives by contrasting their points of view to highlight the tensions. At the conclusion of this theme I contrast Sarah's, Jamal's, and Yusuf's ambivalence with the unequivocal voices of Martin and Anwar, who did not perceive that difference poses a particular problem for the Coalition, nor did they think there is any need to directly take up issues of difference.

Sarah

> *In the end what I think what a lot of people will find, the differences might emerge, but more importantly, the similarities. And for me that's much bigger than the particular idiosyncrasies.* (496-498)

> *I mean, before attending these meetings and years ago when I really didn't know much—not that I know a lot now—I would have thought that maybe these differences were there, were barriers. The differences aren't barriers any more*

> *. . . when we're at these meetings, and . . . whether it's Kamal or Yaqoob, . . . they're like my brothers; . . . I don't care how they pray; I don't care what they personally believe.* (361-366)

> *We're so afraid that the small steps we've taken—I mean, I'm speaking for myself—so I'm afraid that the small steps that we're taking, that we sometimes maybe are not looking at some of the key issues that we need to look at for fear that going there might end up in a division. . . . And there is so much to do. . . . Maybe in time that'll happen; . . . maybe there might be room and maturity for that.* (544-553)

Sarah's comments reveal that she was of two minds. On the one hand, she seemed drawn to focus on what unites the Coalition and the community. If we recall earlier statements from Sarah, she enunciated the many socio-political reasons for collective action. These conditions, according to Sarah, necessitate protecting the Coalition's capacity to act decisively. The space is protected, in part, by avoiding issues that may divide or create barriers to action.

In the first quotation Sarah privileged similarities, relegating differences to the stature of idiosyncrasies. These differences in behaviour or perspective do not interfere, she said in the next quotation, with her capacity to relate in a friendly manner with her coalition colleagues; their particular religious practices are of no consequence to their relationships. The final quotation takes a bit of a turn, and she indicated her ambivalence. Maybe the depth of fraternity is questionable? Perhaps the cohesion is not as strong as she supposed? Sarah appears to fear that the veneer of unity and fraternity is too fragile to withstand engaging with certain differences. Thus there are some (or perhaps they are the same) differences that cannot be relegated to the level of the idiosyncratic. Perhaps she is that the key issues to which she referred are those in which some of the essentialisms—what the participants have called *basic tenets* or foundation principles—reside.

Jamal

> *Well, you know that we have lots of challenges among us, and some of those challenges are the understanding, of the faith and the understanding of the goals we set and the understanding of the things that each organization needs to achieve. And the priorities. Somehow we don't have a clear vision where everybody wants to be, because we're a bit divided in terms of vision and goals. But I can see that the majority of us have a common goal, but each one a little different.* (83-88)

> *There are differences that are fundamental. And that's why . . . they don't get touched, but that's why it might pose a problem in the future, . . . because the person who wears the 'faith hat,' it's important [that] . . . this person, I think, is going to protect their 'hat,' to have space to talk about that in the future, to be safe talking about [it], have a constructive dialogue. You have to get to a point where it is safe to talk; everybody shares his or her opinion safely.* (167-183)

In the first comment Jamal talked about the differences that he saw among the participants, particularly in the way that they understand and perform 'faith.' These differences shape and shade their goals for the organization. The last sentence in that comment summarizes his thoughts about the existence of a common goal that is nonetheless influenced by member organizations' particular goals as determined by their understanding of what it means to be a Muslim.

In Jamal's next reflection the differences cease to be variations and become fundamental. Now it is clearer why these might pull a common goal in different directions. Jamal was saying that the differences that require engagement are laden with implications. They are not irrelevant, but reflect deeply held principles that are, in his estimation, fundamental, fixed, and a-contextual. These differences are predicated on metaphysical truths that will not be dialogued away, which is why they are not taken up in a substantive way. Hence his call for a safe place to share this view, to have it respected, and to have his attachment to it respected. What will happen when Jamal's

attachment to his identity intersects with Sarah's view of identity as fluid and contested? It appears that Jamal's ambivalence about engaging in some deeper way with these issues or continuing to try to work around them arises out of that very question.

Yusuf

> *From there we all kind of started working together, and, you know, there [are] fundamental differences between the groups, but in the end we're all one and the same; we all believe in the same God. We're all facing the same challenges, and we do need to work together to overcome them.* (85-89)

> *I would say as soon as we established our mission statement, I think, that kind of set the path. So from there we knew exactly that we had overcome all our differences, or at least set them aside, and we knew exactly where we were headed, and I think that was probably the most important accomplishment.* (49-53)

> *So I guess my perspective of this is that we haven't learned, . . . at least as a council. Maybe they see things differently, but as a council we've kind of learned to push things off to the side, so we're very good at avoiding things that may be divisive or controversial. And my personal view is that is basically a disaster waiting to happen, and I know I've identified this in some of our strategic planning sessions, and we're trying to put together some way to mitigate that risk.* (325-332)

Yusuf's first two comments suggest that the fundamental differences are offset by shared experiences of oppression as well as a shared belief in God. Like Sarah and Jamal, Yusuf's desire to accomplish objectives, shared objectives, is, according to the first two comments, a significant driving and unifying force for the Coalition members. In the second comment he began by saying that, through this unifying process, differences have been set aside. Then he rethought that statement and suggested that differences require bracketing, for the time being.

Yusuf's third remark from later in the interview reveals his ambivalence about difference. Perhaps differences cannot be bracketed, overcome, or worked around. The

Coalition's practice of working around the differences is a strategy that has worked until now, but Yusuf was saying that the differences that have been identified as outside the purview of the Coalition are, in fact, having an effect on its members. This relates to Jamal's comments about his reality that particular identity differences are intersected by the group's actions and strategic decisions.

It is important to note that these thoughts arose within the same interview. These are not ideas that evolved over a period of days or weeks. They signify a desire on the part of the participants to ensure the success of the Coalition, which will have a direct and positive impact on their lives and the well-being of their families and communities, while at the same time they are experiencing the internal tensions of having to refrain from full expression of their multiple identities. There are dissonances involved with feeling compelled to say 'yes' to something that you do not really feel comfortable with, but which you know will yield a collective benefit.

There is another, and perhaps more important, way of reading their ambivalence, and that is as an example of the liminal. Do these views represent the emergence of perceptions of identity that are non-dichotomous? Could Sarah, Jamal, and Yusuf's comments be the harbinger of an emerging Mestiza/o consciousness? And could their ambivalence become a bridge between essentialism and non-essentialism? I read in these comments double consciousness as well as split vision (Ladson-Billings, 2000). I do not read their ambivalence as reificatory impulses, but as the breaching of reification and the anxiety that the can exist in the liminal, the uncertain. Cut loose from the centre, from the 'inside' of the essentialized identity, where do Sarah, Jamal, and Yusuf go? Clearly from their comments, not back; at least not yet. Here, in this moment of ambivalence, resides

the possibility of the shift from the essential and the exclusionary, from the binary and dichotomy of either/or to the possibility of neither/nor.

Certainty

Not all of the participants I interviewed were ambivalent about the need for engaging with difference. Martin and Anwar suggested that the Coalition has evolved effective processes for negotiating agreement and making progress on goals and objectives. According to Martin, *"The one fundamental lesson is you have to be able to respect the differences. You don't have to pretend to be all things to but you respect those differences"* (610-612). The presence of difference is a given. For Martin, it is sufficient to respect the presence of those differences and to focus on the commonly held positions. His last sentence suggests that perhaps he knows that there is unease about the bracketing of difference; hence his comment that some people have another perspective, which, according to him, is not helpful. In his next comment about this issue he said, *"I think one of the values we emphasize is focus on what unites us rather than what divides us and that's been important. And this has to be reinforced from time to time"* (612-614). Martin's comments read a bit like a caution: Do not lose focus; remember the larger issues that the group faces; and resist the urge to fragment from within.

Anwar was comfortable with difference, even debating issues, as long as the differences that people embody are not allowed to obstruct the unity of the group: *"So you are different than others, yes; you can fight among you, . . . arguing among yourselves about an issue, but when you leave the door, you're brothers and sisters"* (37-378). Dissent and difference are not problematic for Anwar. What is troubling is allowing the dissent to derail the political solidarity. "Be different" is what I read into

this; challenge each other; but in the political trenches direct your energy at the policies, the practices, and not at debating who is and who is not a Muslim.

The presence of ambivalence suggests that this group is really doing coalition work, that they are experiencing the tensions of negotiating identity differences that can sometimes threaten foundational beliefs, one's sense of self, and one's place in the community. If there was no ambivalence, it would signal total homogeneity, which is not endemic to coalition work. So not only does the presence of ambivalence signal the presence of identity differences, but it also signals the need to develop ways to engage difference so that it does not lead to alienation and marginalization and allows for heterogeneity within the group.

Section Summary

In this section I have discussed how the participants saw the Coalition naming what is and is not constructed as different and which identities are the objects of contestation. I also looked at some of their inner and collective struggles to reconcile collective unity with the realities of navigating multiple subjectivities that are sometimes in tension with each other.

Some differences illustrate how relations of power are mediated through the process of differentiation and situate some groups or individuals in the role of deciding and directing and others as responding. When these relations of power shift, as it appeared to when reified boundaries were softened and what constituted the outside and inside shifted, those who perceive themselves as decentred feel increasingly uncomfortable.

Membership in what some perceive to be fringe orthodoxies, gender, and sometimes sect has been and sometimes continues to be constructed as problematically different. I examined how the participants appeared to be constructing identity differences that are largely liberal multicultural, classificatory, and binary in nature. The presence of these suggests the existence of reified categories, the ongoing maintenance of identity boundaries, and the situating of people inside or outside of the boundaries. Membership has its price and can be acquired through conforming to acceptable practice. Exclusion from certain categories can diminish access to privilege. Access to certain identity categories can also mean access to power—the power to determine representative practices, to determine which values are privileged, and to determine which behaviours are acceptable. These views of identity predominated, but there were exceptions. Miriam, Sarah, and Nadia understood identity as fluid. Attachment to a particular and fixed set of practices, to labelling and categorizing, had little appeal for them.

The contestation of identity and identity differences gives rise to ambivalence. This ambivalence centres on identity differences and the pull to engage with them directly and the aversion to catalyzing problematic divisions. All 10 participants articulated their belief that, shortcomings aside, issues of marginalization and inequity aside, the Coalition is necessary for the Muslim community, and its continued growth and survival are important. At the same time many—not all—were concerned with the avoidance of issues that arise out of the complex intersection of identities. There is no consensus on this issue, and it is possible that their individual ambivalence is being translated into collective ambivalence. This collective nonresponse has resulted in certain tentativeness regarding any straightforward engagement with some of the more tender

differences. This place of individual and collective ambivalence is not necessarily a negative formation. In some ways this ambivalence, this space of neither going backwards nor forwards calls forth images of liminality and the possibilities of it. From the liminal space the possibilities of another way are glimpsed. This is the place of multiplicity and complexity, of nonreificatory ways of identifying and being identified. Seen this way, ambivalence might be interpreted as a space of possibility rather than equivocation one that neither requires neither being managed nor curtailed.

Perhaps one indicator that the Coalition is adopting this perspective is the self-education seminars. Under the rubric of self-education, Coalition members are beginning to use the word *difference* instead of *diversity* in an effort to naturalize and normalize the complexity and multiplicity that are part of this living, evolving set of identities. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

In this section I explored some ways in which difference is understood and expressed. I juxtaposed these forms of differentiation with a discussion on the participants' ambivalence about identity differences. The issue of difference, the underlying tensions related to relations of power that are currently unacknowledged but nonetheless in operation, help to situate the following section in which I discuss the strategies that the Coalition has evolved for negotiating these multiple and sometimes problematic differences.

Strategies for Negotiating Difference

In the previous section I discussed how the participants' comments reflect the salience of identities, the ways in which those identities become differentiated, and the Coalition members' ambivalence towards engaging with identity differences.

Ambivalence aside, it is clear that the presence and effects of multiple, intersecting, and contested identities cannot, as many participants indicated, be bracketed indefinitely. The Coalition has evolved a number of strategies to respond to difference. The methods seem to correspond with the degree to which the identity difference is problematic or contested and according to its capacity to rupture cohesion. The objectives of the strategies depend upon which risk is being managed. Sometimes the objective is to maintain cohesion; at other times it is to prevent exclusion. Perhaps the overriding purpose of all of the strategies is to enable the collective implementation of actions to address racist policies and social practices. As one participant observed, this is in many ways a strategic coalition whose strength resides in its capacity to speak for almost 19,000 Muslims who reside in the area. To this end the overriding ethos seems to be focused, at this point in the group's evolution, on finding and building common ground.

The section is presented in five parts. In the first four I discuss the strategies that the participants identified as being the current mode of dealing with difference. The fifth section reflects their hopes for and fears of a deeper engagement with the issues. Although some of these suggestions for engaging with difference were tentative, they were nonetheless present, and I think it is important to present that perspective as well. What these participants were suggesting differs from the current strategies, which appear to be more focused on managing the differences rather than on probing their origins and implications. It is the latter that some believe requires attention.

Current Modes of Engaging With Identity Challenges

In this section I discuss the strategies and processes identified in the interviews that the Coalition uses to negotiate identity differences. I also present the participants'

reflections on the value of each. The five processes the participants identified are strong leadership, consensus, compromise, self-education, and bracketing. These five were the processes most often mentioned and had the most force behind them; that is, whether for good or ill, the participants felt strongly about them.

Sometimes the strategies emerged directly out of their own language, as with consensus and education. I modified or assigned other terms to describe the processes that the participants identified in the interviews. They did not use strong leadership, compromise, and bracketing specifically to describe the strategy, but I believe that they are good descriptors of what the participants recounted. The issue of dialogue as a strategy is on the wish list of strategies for some of the people whom I interviewed. Although their voices were few and their reasons were varied and even in tension, I believe that it is important to report this aspect of the multiplicity. To contribute these voices to the coalitional discourse on identity and difference is to better reflect the polyphony present in this coalition's culture.

Strong leadership. Although the participants did not specifically use the adjective *strong*, I felt that their descriptions of the type of leadership used to negotiate difference imply a kind of forcefulness or fearlessness. Of all of the current methods of negotiating difference, that which I call *strong leadership* was the least criticized Although one participant was sceptical of this type of decision making and described it as a kind of foreclosure imposed upon group processes, it does appear that this form of leadership is quite unilateral and commands little, if any, consultation; furthermore, what consultation there was did not occur in a general-meeting setting. Aside from the one criticism, other comments focused on the effect of the decisions that were taken. Strong leadership is

what resulted in Shi'a and Ismaili Muslims' and women's inclusion in the Coalition. It was also implicated in the thwarting of an attempt to have Coalition events held as segregated events. It is interesting that these three decisions served to interrupt oppressive forms of differentiation and the binary constructions of gendered and sectoral identities. Yaqoob commented on the effects of this method of negotiating difference:

> *I think by that time Mo was acknowledged as the acclaimed leader; that the way to call the third meeting will be to just take out of the equation all those folks who had this view that Ismailis and Shi'as were not Muslims.*(108-111)

> *There was one particular person, . . . and I think that he raised the issue of whether the participation of women in the group was appropriate, so he [the leader] put an end to that. But at the end of it what became abundantly clear is that we are not a religious group; we were more of a political group. And I think that at the end of it I felt that this can take off, because we had* good leadership [emphasis added]. (175-181)

This stewardship was critical, according to Yaqoob, to get this coalition off the ground and onto the 'right' footing. Good leadership helped to establish more porous boundaries, truncate binaries, and create a focus on the activist nature of the group. I had a sense from Yaqoob's, Yusuf's, and Amin's comments that this type of decision making was what enabled this coalition to be broad based.

Martin also saw the principles behind this leadership as serving to model acceptable coalitional behaviours:

> *[I] guess two or three things. Firstly, living those values; so-called walking the talk. And that's important, and [the leadership] embodies that. Then there is the question of having that visibility in the community so that . . . they recognize he's . . . listened to and respected by people in different segments of the community. And so it kind of strengthens that bond; it acts as a catalyst in that regard.* (596-600)

Difficult decisions had to be made during critical points in the Coalition's development, and Martin was saying that this particular style of leadership enabled those tough decisions to be taken because the leadership was credible and respected. Yusuf and Yaqoob both suggested that knowing the community and the existence of potential barriers to working across differences also helped the leaders to judge when to exercise strong leadership and when to move to other forms of negotiation.

Consensus and compromise. By far the most common form of negotiation entails the use of consensus and compromise, both of which the participants viewed as mixed blessings. *Consensus* is a term that they used extensively to describe the Coalition's predominant mode of decision making, which is formally sanctioned in its bylaws. *Compromise* is not a term that the participants used specifically, but I feel that it describes some of the processes that they recounted. I distinguish between the two in this way: Consensus involves moving forward on proposals or issues only if there is complete agreement among the directors. With consensus there is an all-or-nothing quality: We all agree, or we don't proceed. Compromise, on the other hand, appears in this case to mean that all parties have to give up something to proceed with a task. Lewis described consensus as *"a strength to the point that because it had kept a very diverse group of people together and has done a lot of terribly productive things that wouldn't have been accomplished otherwise"* (182-184).

Not only has the Coalition been able to arrive at decisions on complex and contested issues, but it has also been quantitatively productive. It is working on a number of fronts simultaneously, including the establishment of a chair in Islamic studies at the university, and with the provincial department of education to advise on modifications to

curriculum to correct racialized stereotypes. Moreover, it has lobbied the federal government on immigration and security issues that negatively affect Muslims in Canada. Consensus has also facilitated these accomplishments in spite of significant identity differences and having to work within challenging socio-political circumstances, all while making space for minority voices to be heard within the Coalition. Through consensus the Coalition also navigated some complex decisions on the same-sex marriage issue, produced public education documents, and presented an invitation to a religious celebration, which are some of the examples that the participants reported to me. Common to all of these decisions was the accounting for marginalized identities. Not only were those voices heard, but they were also able to influence how the identity of Muslims would be represented. Martin summarized how consensus worked with the issue of same-sex marriage:

> *There was some discussion about this broader issue of same-sex marriage, for example, and there are some institutions that did not feel comfortable in taking a stand on that issue. Others did, and what we basically did was that we did not proceed with it through the [Coalition].* (43-47)

Martin described what others also described. A multifaith group approached the Coalition to work with it to oppose same-sex marriage, but a couple of member institutions would not support this position or any coalitional involvement in it. The result was the Coalition did *not* take a stand against same-sex marriage. However, there is another aspect to any consensus process, and that is that sometimes the majority are disappointed. This disappointment is not always easy to dismiss or forget. Jamal has found some of these consensus decisions

> *scary in a way, scary just because [you have to] accept the views that each person brings. When you re faced with a decision to make and it's an important decision and somebody doesn't see it, doesn't go for it, that's the scary part.* (197-199)

Jamal's comments reflect the difficulty in compromising—the essence of coalitional processes and organizing. A coalition's chief characteristic is difference, which necessitates doing the difficult work of giving up and sometimes feeling marginalized because of that.

Lewis described this as "minimizing the majority view" (151) which is, according to the many comments on consensus and compromise, not an uncommon view. If the majority view or the centre becomes 'just another' way of being Muslim, if it loses its place at the centre, then its privileged position is also challenged.

Consensus is just one way that these identity categories have been opened up for discussion. An invitation to celebrate Eid al-Adha entailed careful discussion and compromise, which Anwar described as indicative of the middle way. I have included this rather lengthy text because it tells the story so well:

> *This is a celebration for Eid al-Adha. The . . . Sunni and the Shi'a, they believe that the sacrifice that the Prophet Abraham did is for his son Ishmael. So we said to the house leader, because he wants to send an invitation out, he says, "I want a script on what this all about." So we wrote a script and said, "Okay, this is to celebrate the sacrifice of the prophet Abraham, to sacrifice his son Ishmael, and this is it," and we sent it. So the Ismailis looked at it and said, "You know what? We don't believe that it is Ishmael; it's Isaac; it's the other son of Abraham." I did not know at all. . . . So some people got tense. For example, some said, "Why should we change our religion because of this?" . . . So we said, "You know what? . . . You think of the middle; always you have a solution." So I said, "You know what? Let's have the guide say, 'This is because our Prophet sacrificed his son.' . . . Okay? 'He sacrificed his son.' Let's stop there." WE stopped. We put a point, and we stopped.* (518-530)

What Anwar and some appear to have considered an obvious and simple solution, others saw as a negation of their perspective. Anwar noted that some people felt that they were *changing their religion* because of the compromise. For those individuals, the rupturing of rigid borders, the engendering of porosity were perceived as exclusionary. This is an interesting paradox indeed. For Anwar, this was representative of how productive searching for a middle ground can be. In his view, everybody was a winner; the variations were an array of possibilities rather than mutually exclusive categories. But for others, inclusion, porosity, and multiplicity are threatening: *"By . . . sort of including all of the fringes, you can sort of marginalize or minimize some of the core values, I think, that are more representative, I guess, of the overall community"* (Lewis, 153-155). Lewis' comments represent an interesting tension around the value of compromise and consensus. Anwar saw this as including everything, whereas Lewis and Jamal saw it as excluding. My reading of this is that it decentres the dominant group, which interrupts the dominant relations of power that are present within this community. That group reads it as oppressive and scary, which it likely is, but, performatively, the compromise disrupts binaries and transgresses classificatory boundaries. These acts of compromise and consensus gesture towards hybridity, a transgressive and subversive act within essentialist paradigms. Jamal, Lewis, and Anwar have been engaged a tug-of-war between maintaining identity boundaries and inculcating porosity through compromise.

Bracketing. For the most part, issues that have the potential to be explosive or divisive have been bracketed. This harkens back to Anwar's middle way and his belief that the Coalition should *"always talk about what unites you and leave what divides you"*

(508), Bracketing, for Anwar, is a perfectly acceptable strategy for dealing with difference.

Martin expressed a similar perspective: *"We have defined some parameters around what we do and the kind of areas that we will get involved in and work on, and I think as long as we keep within those ones, everybody feels comfortable"* (40-42). Bracketing is comfortable, circumvents confrontation, and allows for the maintenance of good relations. In Martin's view, negotiating multiple identities and differences is easier because the Coalition has made it clear what its mandate is and is not. What the Coalition is not mandated to do is to take on matters of religion (*hijab*, ritual practices, holidays, etc.). This creates a level of safety in knowing that the foci of the group will remain on those issues that were agreed upon during the process of drafting the mandate, vision, and objectives. The other advantage of this, according to Martin, is that invoking the delimiters of the Coalition presents a method to address controversial issues.

Similarly, Miriam suggested that there has been adequate space for people to express their views: *"Anything that has not been fully explored or articulated in terms of people speaking their truth, I believe it hasn't been that important to that person"* (324-325). Furthermore,

> *I know on a couple of occasions there have been issues that have been somewhat burning for me, but as I drive away from that meeting I always think, Ach! It's not the hill I'm going to die on. . . . And at the same time—for example, on the gay-rights issue—there will be a hill. We'll see how we mount it; we'll see. But . . . my sense is not that there's anybody sitting around that table seething with repression . . . or really feeling like they're being repressed or not able to speak their truth or being part of something they don't believe in or feel good about.* (229-236)

For Miriam, *if* people have held back, it is not because there was something that they felt they could not say; rather, it was that they chose not to speak at this particular time.

Personal choice rather than organizational processes or structure dictates when people will speak and what they will say. Conversely, what she has observed is that the value of the work that the Coalition is doing offsets any issue that is not being taken up. Its commitment to the overall cause of the group acts as a counterweight to any issues that it might have bracketed. However Miriam issued a caveat when she predicted that there would come an issue (for her) when she might have to take something out of its bracketed place and speak to it. But for her, and, she guessed, for others as well, that time has not arrived.

It is fascinating to compare Miriam's views with Nadia's:

> *I feel that we tend to push those [controversial] issues under the rug. I think right now [the Coalition], because of where it is in its stage, I sense there is a genuine concern that if we bring those controversial issues to the table, that [the Coalition] might crumble.* (364-366)

> *And I think [the Coalition] is very much a child right now, and if it's not guided correctly, it can take a wrong turn or it can, I guess, crumble. And I don't think anybody around the table wants that. So there is that, and that's why people don't want to perhaps touch sensitive issues.* (388-391)

Nadia had a sense that some issues were being set aside for the time being, but this is not a privileging of agendas, in her view; it is an act of protection. She drew an analogy between organizational development and human development. Like a child, a coalition in its infancy and childhood requires structure and support. Part of the necessary structural support includes not testing the capacity of the group beyond its developmental capacity. This image of members' tending to the Coalition may also help to explain why people are staying in spite of having to bracket particular subjectivities. It may even indicate emerging nonessential understandings of identity that would predispose individuals to

attend to particular subjectivities within the context of the Coalition and perhaps in other activist spaces as well.

Hijab might be one of those issues. Although it *has* been addressed through compromise, it appears that some have only bracketed it. In *TUMIC* the compromise position on *hijab* reads: *"Islam teaches both men and women to dress modestly. Typically hijab refers specifically to a headscarf worn by many female Muslims. Traditions and societal norms influence modest dress in various cultures"* (05 DOC, p. 11). This is a similar compromise to the daily prayers and Eid Al Adha issues. It suggests multiplicity without privileging any particular performative quality. The following are two views on this issue:

> *For example, on the issue of* hijab, . . . *if the Women's Organization or Community 05 say "No, our organization's interpretation of* hijab *is modesty in thoughts and actions rather than the exterior," then that is fine; that is fine.* (Yaqoob, 405-408)

> *I'm thinking of France as an example. France barred the* hijab. *If you have your representative organization say that it's not mandatory or it's only required at prayer times, . . . if your representative organization doesn't stand behind you on those cases, . . . then a lot of people could see the Coalition not protecting their community and basic tenets of the faith.* (Lewis, 201-205)

Yaqoob's comments reflect the compromise position in *TUMIC*. Women express their Muslim identities in numerous ways and interpret commandments within specific contexts. For Yaqoob, the issue has been resolved through compromise; however, for Lewis, the issue is not resolved; compromise has led him to bracket the issue. The role of the Coalition as he saw it is to protect the community from harm by essentializing identity. He was saying that the community then has legal recourse through human-rights protection for religious freedoms. The intersection of racialization and identity

essentialisms will be discussed in the next chapter; for now it is sufficient to flag the persistent presence of essentialisms within coalitions and their resistance to compromise and consensus. The persistence I will code here as bracketing or the setting aside of issues until some future time. In the case of the Coalition, it will also entail a future process not yet included in its repertoire.

Education. Sarah's sentiment was echoed by others and is embodied in many of the comments already presented: *"I believe in educating yourself because it is through ignorance and fear that a lot of trouble happens"* (204). Learning about Other Muslims and making important connections was an important motivator for many whom I interviewed. There has been a great deal of informal and incidental learning that has taken place in the Coalition. Sarah said to me:

> *It's been an amazing experience being part of [the Coalition]. . . . I had such a different view of [Other Muslims] two years ago: . , . "They don't do this, they don't do that, right? . . . So are they Muslims?" . . . Now, I understand now, when I look at values, we are all the same. But the good thing was that we could talk about it.* (270-288)

Amin recounted a conversation between himself and Sarah in which she talked about her own biases before she began to work alongside other Muslims in this coalition. In his interview Amin stressed the importance of being able to talk about formerly held misconceptions. Another person (not Sarah) who also told me about this same incident agreed that it is being able to talk openly about these issues that is so important. Dispelling fear, confronting stereotypes, and clearing up misconceptions are more like the external work of the Coalition, but a strategic planning document (10 DOC) recognized that a slightly more formalized type of organization was needed and recommended that the Coalition include

> Bi Monthly meeting where each member community/organization makes a presentation....The focus needs to be on understanding each other with an emphasis on the plurality of interpretations. The more we know, the better we can appreciate the diversity that exists and the stronger we become as a group. (p. 3)

In December 2005 the Coalition began to invite its member organizations to make a 20-minute presentation to the group for the purpose of self-education:

> *Each organization will talk about itself within the [the Coalition], so that the other organizations have a better perspective. And that's the education that I was talking about earlier. You know, we need to start with that. And the lack of education is not there because we're not bright enough; it's just not there because we have never taken an interest in the other.* (Nadia, 506-510)

This process contributes to the building of bridges among the various communities and constituencies within the broader Muslim community. And it does signal willingness to surface differences as well as similarities. The presentations (I was able to observe two) are fairly formal. Each is about 20 minutes long, followed by a short question-and-answer session. Strict parameters guide the question-and-answer portion, and dialogue, discussion, and debate are not part of the process. I observed a presentation about the Ithna'Ashariya and the Women's Group.

During the first session the presenter talked about the Shi'a Ithna-asheri and went into some detail about how the Shi'a came into being and the various branches of the sect and so forth. He chose to use the word *different* throughout his talk to situate Shi'a, Ismaili, and Sunni interpretations. He privileged neither sameness nor difference but said that there are overlaps as well as differences among the three sects. When the question-and-answer session began, he entertained seven questions. The last question referred to the ritual lamentation of Ali (the first Imam, or spiritual leader, of the Shi'a, who was brutally murdered). However, the question was phrased to include the word *torture*: "Do

mourners torture themselves?" The use of such a loaded term resulted in an uncomfortable moment, the presenter quickly answered the question, and the session ended. Similarly during the Women's Group's presentation, the presenter profiled her group's action to resist the implementation of Sharia law in Ontario, which she depicted as an accomplishment. During the question-and-answer session a male questioner wanted to take up the group's work on Sharia, and, as the organization's presenter began to respond, the chair intervened: "We're at risk of getting into a debate about Sharia law" (Analysis OBS 6, #5g). He affirmed that there are multiple positions on Sharia and suggested that it be left at that.

I highlight these presentations and their interlocutors to draw attention to the probability that below the surface, at least for some members, there still lurks a lack of recognition that the other Muslims have a legitimate claim to identify as Muslims. I also detect a resistance to multiplicity. Identities that do not sit in hermetically sealed and isolated universes, but bump up against one another, interrupt one another, and even challenge each other appear to engender a discomfort in some members of the Coalition. It appears that the idea of complex identities and the contestation that surrounds such complexity are perceived as being, if not inherently dangerous, then as posing a threat to the functioning of the Coalition. The response of the Coalition's leadership in these two instances was to truncate the conversation, to bracket the difference. However these are the types of issues that other Coalition members have noted require a deeper conversation, and some risk taking.

Dialogue. The fifth process that I discuss is not currently used, but some participants identified the need to think about how more challenging issues, such as those

relating to differences in interpretation, might be wrestled with more fully and directly in the future. One participant referred to this form of engagement as *dialogue*, and I will use that term here. Miriam spoke to its importance in coalitional work:

> *The more diversity you have, the more time and space you have to allow for dialogue and coming to an understanding, and you can't have tons of diversity and just plough through an agenda. . . . You can do that, just go through the surface, plough through the agenda, but then at some point the question is, Is this an optics kind of thing, or is this people speaking deep, meaningful understanding of the other?* (253-257)

Miriam called for time and space to engage with the issues that will inevitably surface in a setting where there are many differences and the stakes are high. She was saying that in a more homogeneous space, expediency will work more easily than it will in spaces where differing identities mean differing interpretations of agendas or, indeed, signal the presence of potentially conflicting agendas. In her last sentence she pointed out her own preference to understand the person who has been constructed as different in a way that goes beyond information sharing.

Perhaps what inhibits the Coalition, beyond the developmental issues that Nadia raised (in the section on bracketing), is that it is *"trying to deal with that issue of fear of the unknown, the more you know about each other the less apprehensions there are as to what they think ...what their belief systems are and so forth"* (Martin, 656-658).

The Muslim who is understood as being different is, in many cases, unknown, according to Martin. In spite of the fact that all members of the Coalition are Muslim, many do not know a great deal about the varied and constantly changing faces of Muslim identities. This, coupled with being a minority group living under the shadow of Islamophobia, contributes to insularity and self-protection. These sessions will not be a

panacea, but they are a beginning. Educating one another and moving towards a dialogue process will both speak and contribute to the Coalition's organizational maturity.

Section Summary

The focus of this section was on the multiple strategies that this coalition has developed to sometimes engage with and sometimes circumnavigate the identity differences that are manifest in so many facets of its work and processes. In the introduction I pointed out that these strategies have more than one purpose. Sometimes they are used to include, sometimes to maintain cohesion, and at other times to forge a common strategy. Although their strategic success, according to the participants, is unmitigated (evidenced by their continued growth after five years), internal dynamics have created a pull to consider augmenting the current means of negotiating difference to begin engaging on a deeper level with the identity differences. What was not mentioned was any desire to probe the aetiology of identity differences or the impact of essentialisms and their concordant differences on the privileging of agendas and knowledge.

On the strategies themselves, the participants' comments reflect both convergent and divergent perspectives of their relative merits. All but one credited strong leadership for averting the exclusion of minority sects, women participants, and the segregation of women during public events. I did not hear any criticism of either the method or the outcomes of this form of stewardship. Similarly, those who commented on education viewed it as playing a vital role in mitigating fear and ignorance. Fear and ignorance, some felt, contribute to nonporous boundaries and exclusionary practices. Some members of the Coalition consider the current bimonthly in-services as sufficient to achieve the

level of awareness necessary for coalition work. However, others felt that the kinds of differences that the group has had and will continue to face dictate more thoughtful engagement. *Dialogue* is one word that the participants used to describe the way forward on these issues. Although not everyone used that particular word, 6 of the 10 I interviewed felt that, when the group is developmentally ready, it should begin to explore issues such as *hijab*, Sharia law, and differences in practice. If this is done without interrogating the constructed nature of these differences, if it is approached from within a framework of essentialism, then the possibility exists, as one participant put it, of degenerating into a dichotomous mire, out of which only one true identity can emerge.

By far the most controversial yet most often used means of negotiating difference is consensus and its relation, compromise. The participants' comments suggest that they are sometimes viewed as transgressive practices—as practices that have the potential to interrupt identity essentialisms such as those premised on classificatory boundaries. However, an interesting paradox emerged in the participants' analyses of these and other processes. The more porous the border, the more that some felt that the *majority* were being excluded. That is, including Muslim Others in representative practices and in strategic decision making excludes others from occupying privileged ground. Sometimes the participants used words such as *core beliefs* and *basic tenets* to flag this phenomenon. This is what engenders feelings of fear and concern for some in response to some of the decisions that have been made that open up identity to interpretive practice.

The other side of these analyses came from those within the Coalition who are completely comfortable with compromise and consensus. This middle way, as one participant called it, is the place for coalition work. This group, in their estimation, does

not exist to meet every need, but rather to forge a broad base of support for political action. For these people, identity is something to be negotiated outside of the group. Within the group it is a strategic tool upon which political action is built. Compromise wording and representations that make room for multiple practices are beside the point, which is racist legislation, education, and social conditions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored three questions: How does differentiation occur within the Coalition? What subjectivities have become identified as differences? Finally, what processes do coalitions use to negotiate these differences? The first two questions were the subject of the first section of this chapter. I found that the Coalition members were constructing and understanding difference in three ways. Some were conceptualizing it as diversity, which conforms to liberal multicultural ideas of difference. Either it is something to be celebrated, or it does not really exist in any substantive way. Qur'anic passages helped to substantiate this view. Although apparently less problematic, this view fails to account for how differences embed relations of power and for the fact that failure to take this up allows them to continue to circulate.

The second form of differentiation is what I call classificatory, using Hall's (1997) terminology. This is evidenced in the maintenance of boundaries related to sectarian affiliation and orthodoxy. The boundedness of these classifications became evident when the participants discussed issues related to compromise and consensus. For those who seek to protect their identity integrity through the preservation of difference (as the demarcation of one group begins and the other ends), compromise and consensus blur the boundaries and muddy the identities.

The final form of differentiation is binary opposites. The only forms of binary within the Coalition to which the participants referred were gendered binaries. Although strong leadership (a method of negotiating difference) has pushed back against this binary, it still appears to operate at some level within this coalition; at least that is how I read the silence on these issues. In the two instances in which resistance occurred, it was men who did the resisting, and it was men who spoke of those issues. The silence of women in these processes (not on the issues) seems to speak to the operation of the binary in some way. Unless the concept of binary differences is analyzed and the issue of power is intersected with this form of differentiation, the Coalition runs the risk of re-inscribing and reinforcing relations of power that situate men as dominant and women as subordinate.

As a transition to the section on negotiating differences, I explored the phenomenon of ambivalence and contrasted it with certitude. Three of the participants in particular were eloquent on this issue, although they did not frame it themselves as ambivalence. Their comments on difference reflect a tension between wanting to focus on those issues that unite and being drawn into addressing underlying issues related to identity differences and their effects. Another set of tensions arises out of the conflict between the liberal multicultural myth of benign differences and the perception that they are not so benign after all. Given this neither-here-nor-there quality, this in-betweenness, I began to read this ambivalence as liminality. Read this way, individual and collective ambivalence acts to forestall foreclosure on issues of identity, belonging, and the nature of the Coalition. If it can continue to be strategically successful while protecting this liminality, then this coalitional space could indeed become a place where Muslim identity

is transformed into the plurality of which Nadia spoke and into the place of multiplicity at which Anwar hinted.

It is important to note that not all of the participants feel ambivalent on this issue, and I discuss the comments of two of the participants who believe that the shared analysis of the political problem developed during its formative stages is the basis upon which the Coalition is founded and upon which its cohesion depends. For them, compromise and consensus are not about giving up, but about ensuring its strategic success.

Finally, I concluded the chapter by answering the second question about processes for negotiating difference. Taking my lead from the participants, I identified five processes in current use and one that some would like to see used. The five are strong leadership, consensus, compromise, bracketing, and education. The participants identified dialogue as an important process to add to the Coalition's repertoire. They saw strong leadership and education as unproblematic and as adding to the group's capacity to encourage free interplay among members by encouraging inclusive practices and dispelling misconceptions. The participants credited strong leadership for keeping women and minority sects in the group and for resisting an exclusionary minority that would, through these exclusions, pre-empt the Coalition's viability.

The participants were split on their assessment of consensus and compromise. For some, as mentioned above, this is the way to protect the Coalition's strategic goals. For others, finding a way to represent and accommodate a wide range of subjectivities felt threatening. Some felt that making space for the perspectives of those who may not occupy the centre in fact displaced the centre. Some perceived this interruption of their privilege as dangerously problematic. It is important and interesting to note that this

feeling of being decentred did not translate into any epiphanies about those who spend most of their time on the margins; nor did their own positionality within the broader Canadian society lend itself to drawing parallels between their newly decentred position and that of others within their coalition.

This leads to commentary on the final method of negotiating difference, which I call bracketing. For those who view consensus and compromise as a valuable process, bracketing makes the perfect corollary sense. What does not fit into the compromise position is shelved. For those who expressed concern about some of the compromises that had been made, bracketing is only a very temporary solution. Inevitably, they said, the issues that have been bracketed, those things marked as different, will have to be engaged with. Some of those issues concern *hijab*, Sharia law, and the way in which religious practices are currently represented.

I will conclude by contextualizing all of this analysis with the observation that in spite of all of these tensions, contestations, and critiques, all of those whom I interviewed have an unwavering belief in the value and necessity of the Coalition. Nine of the 10 are proud of what has been achieved, conscious as they are of the complex differences that have been negotiated to accomplish what has been accomplished. Only one individual expressed the possibility that these differences could undermine this coalition's viability; the remainder believe that the group has nurtured sufficient intragroup trust and compassion that it will be able to traverse the ground before it, regardless of the terrain.

CHAPTER 6:

IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE WITHIN A MUSLIM COALITION

Introduction

The reflections of the Coalition members and their collective actions do not tell one story, but rather tell that there is *no one story* to be constructed, even amongst those whose collective struggle is forged out of common cause. The stories I heard suggest that the search for coalitional coherence is not found in the indoctrination of many to conform to one truth, but rather is found in the struggle of many to construct ways of working together that allow difference to flourish. In spite of this insight, stories of inside/outside, us/them, and authentic/inauthentic abound in the guise of a universal truth. And yet leaking out from the edges of these stories and these categories are the paradoxes, ambiguities, and ambivalences that hint at a different future (Trinh, 1987). Some small space has been made within this coalition for contestation, for struggle, for reflection and reflexivity. These spaces in between the clearly demarcated categories of identity and belonging, these liminal spaces, have fostered ambivalence, which I read as possibility.

The focus of this study was on how racialized coalitions facilitate or repress the articulation of multiple identities. The central question of the study was about how identities and differences are understood, expressed, or suppressed at the individual and the collective level within a Muslim coalition. The findings were at times surprising, filled with contrasts, contradictions, and paradoxes. They show a subset of the Muslim community, this coalition, as expressing both essentialist and non-essentialist understandings of identity. The participants described their differences as evidence of a Divine blessing and as potentially dangerous for the Coalition's well being. At times they

were willing to engage these differences directly, and at other times they viewed difference as so potentially problematic that it must be set aside until some undetermined time in the future. In contrast to this ambivalence, there was strong consensus on the value of the Coalition and its work. There was complete agreement that Muslims are marginalized and face serious issues within Canada and that a coalitional approach to organizing resistance is more effective than sectarian attempts to interrupt political and social practices that oppress and exclude. There was also agreement on the need for the internal differences to be recognized and addressed in a coherent fashion. The participants felt that an ad hoc approach to engaging with differences could be effective only in the short run and that for long-term sustainability, some way of engaging with thorny differences needs to be developed. Where their views diverged was on how to resolve or work with the differences.

The multiple views of identity and difference and the contestations that arise suggest a need for the Coalition to interrogate the difference between coalitional unity and homogeneity. The ubiquity of difference suggests that the Coalition will need to see it as endemic to the group and its work. Continuing to develop and refine its approaches to understanding and negotiating difference will be important for the group's longevity and continued complexity. Finally, I found that the presence of ambivalence appears to act as a safeguard against reificatory tendencies, preserving the Coalition as a space which grows less, rather than more, exclusionary.

In this chapter I discuss three important dimensions of the findings as read through the prism of the literature that I reviewed in chapter 2, as well as through the prism of my own hopefulness for this/these community/ies. These three dimensions are

community as a construct, difference and differentiation in the coalition, and ambivalence about identity and difference in a coalition. Bannerji's (2000) understanding of community "as a formation, . . . cultural and political practice" (p. 154) guides a discussion of the first dimension. This first section is called The Making of The Muslim Community: The Fallout from Islamophobia. The second section deals with the types of differentiation described in the interviews and the strategies that the Coalition has developed for negotiating them. This second section is read through the work of some of the identity and coalition theories reviewed earlier, such as Bystydzienski and Schacht (2001), Hall (1996, 1997), and Mohanty (2003), and is called The Coalition as Bricolage. The third dimension of the discussion is ambivalence. This takes up the leakages (Trinh, 1987), the "something which comes between well-established identities and breaks them up" (Arber, 2000, p. 60), and resituates these as signs of hope. This third section is entitled Ambivalence as Possibility.

The Making of The Muslim Community: The Fallout from Islamophobia

According to Bannerji (2000), being designated as perpetually the undifferentiated Other "makes the community into a minoritarian concept, one whose political and social roots lie in being collectively marked out as different from the hegemonic group" (p. 155). Michael (2003) echoed Bannerji's claim and also understands the formation of community enclaves as a reaction to the perception of an external threat. The threat facing Muslims in the West is both discursive and material. Neo-Orientalist discourses such as Islamophobia ascribe to Muslims an inherent orientation to monoculture that is essentially alien to Western culture. Within the

discourse of Islamophobia, anyone identifying in any way as a Muslim is ipso facto non-Western and potentially an enemy of the West. Thus labelled and grouped, Muslims are all potentially vulnerable to its effects. As Anwar so accurately pointed out, the application of discriminatory laws and social practices is not a nuanced enterprise. They do not distinguish among the complex and contested manifestations of Muslim identities. Islamophobia or fear and hatred of Muslims impacts Ismailis, Shi'as, and Sunnis. It affects orthodox and non-orthodox Muslims. It is a problem for Muslim men and Muslim women. The material effects are the impacts that immigration laws, racist stereotypes, and the absence of positive public images have on the people themselves. This coalition has positioned itself as providing a collective response to a socio-political reality, not as an expression of natural homogeneity.

This is corroborated by the findings in which three of the four motivators for becoming involved with the Coalition indicate the existence of significant differences that constitute, not a homogeneous and monolithic Muslim identity, but a heterogeneous and even contested identity. This suggests the fragmented if not multiple nature of their communities rather than a monolithic presence. Of course, discursive productions of a Muslim minoritarian enclave, especially because it is perceived as holding values antithetical to Western values, creates an interesting paradox for Muslims living or born in the West. In Canada, where first- and second-generation Muslims came of age during the era of liberal multiculturalism, hyphenated identities were *de rigueur*. These hyphenated identities rarely bespoke a religious component, given the deemphasizing of religion in the public sphere. Most complex identities were described in terms of ethnicity or nationalities. Bannerji (1995, 2000) has commented on the disturbing

increase in the salience of religion as an identifier, a salience that has had an impact on how some within the Muslim community understand their own and the broader Muslim community to be situated with respect to identity.

This struggle to situate their identities is manifest within the Coalition as the tension between its desire to demonstrate unity and coherence with the reality of its multiplicity. In spite of an attempt to bracket differences in nationality, language, ethnicity, culture, gender, sect, and orthodoxy, these differences shape the worldviews and practices of individual Muslims and Muslim sub communities. This possibly unconscious attempt to replicate the West's one-dimensional view of Muslims does not reconcile with what I heard from those I interviewed or with the principles of the Coalition. Many of those I interviewed do not view their collective complexity and group cohesion as being mutually exclusive, any more than they perceive their Muslim identity as excluding Canadian identity. However, what is emerging within the Coalition for some members is the desire to present a unified representation of Canadian Muslims. This conflation of cohesiveness with identity conformity inadvertently seems to validate the artificial homogeneity present in Islamophobic discourses. This impulse also runs counter to the lived reality of Muslims whose identities have been and continue to be shaped by context. This impulse appears to arise, in part, out of the fear of repression and oppression. Two overt references to the issue of *hijab* and prayer substantiate this. This dialectic of a racist discourse that shapes the interior of a racialized community and the community's then reinforcing the discourse is reminiscent of Escher's picture of *Waterfall*, in which water paradoxically "appears to run downhill before reaching the top of the waterfall" (Wikipedia, 2007, ¶ 1). It is impossible to tell which direction the water

is flowing, which makes tracing the flow to its origins an improbable task. The Muslim community appears to be caught in its own Escherian paradox. Discourse circumscribes by informing the way that something is perceived. Because Muslims are also Westerners, it appears that they are vulnerable to these discourses. Caught in a discursive web, the community is struggling to step outside this web to resist it and refute it. In addition to this discursive web, the East/West binary leaves Muslims in a position of repudiating their identity or situating themselves in a binary relationship. There is, of course, another option, and that is to deconstruct the binary to interrupt the discourse. To do this, Muslims would have to begin to ask, where did this imagery and the imaginary of Muslims begin?

This is the inheritance of the Coalition. Although it labours to construct coherence and unity, it is also perfectly reflective of the richly varied, lived experiences of those who call themselves Muslims. Some privilege their religious subjectivity, whereas others do not. The portrait of the communities that emerged through this study of a Muslim coalition suggests that multiple subjectivities interrupt and intersect one another within individuals and among coalition members, seeking space for expression and inclusion. By virtue of the inherent complexity and tensions that come to the group through its membership, the Coalition can be characterized as a typically *coalitional* space (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Lugones, 2003; Reagon, 2000). By this I mean that coalitions are characteristically dominated by differences that give rise to tensions. Complicating this coalition's reality is the group's desire to seek refuge in the company of those perceived to be similarly oppressed or excluded. However, when a group perceives that it is at risk in the broader community, it is understandable that it might also

perceive that it is offering the protection of Reagon's barred room. I found these two desires present among the members of this coalition. That is, the Coalition members realize that within the coalition their differences render the space as not entirely safe, and yet in the broader community they also feel quite threatened. This was true for most, but not all, of those I interviewed. According to Reagon, this is typical of coalitional dynamics in which "the only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that's the only way you can figure you can stay alive" (pp. 343-344).In spite of these yearnings for a barred room, the Coalition featured in this study is much more like a coalitional space than not. This is evidenced in the contested nature of identity as well as the difficulty of the work. The Coalition's organizational structure also speaks to its coalitional character, comprised as it is of member organizations.

Given this interpretation of the group, the desire for homogeneity is inconsistent with its coalitional identity. It is also counterproductive to reproduce the racialized and essentializing myth of Islamophobic discourses. This coalition need not strive to (re)inscribe and patrol the boundaries set out by such discourses to be a successful coalition (Bannerji, 2000; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Lugones, 2003; Lyons, 2001; Quinterro, 2001). The ideal coalition premised upon identities that are nonessential, fluid, and contextual does not intend or demand identity coherence. Rather, coalitions enable the collective evolution of a shared analysis of the source and structure of their oppression and a shared commitment to resisting it. The very thing that creates discomfort is also the thing that refutes racializing and oppressive discourses such as Islamophobia.

Coalitions as Bricolage: Difference, Differentiation, and Relations of Power

The title of this section was inspired by a passage from the work of Lincoln and Denzin (2000). Although they were referring to research methodologies, it seems apt for this context: "As we assemble different pieces of the Story, our bricolage begins to take not one, but many shapes" (p. 1060). Bricolage, the art of improvisation from what is available, reminds me of coalition work, the work of stitching together a collective out of a patchwork of identifications, differences, shared her-/histories, and even past conflicts. Bricolage never intends uniformity. It becomes, through its many parts, a thing-unto-itself by virtue of the sense-making with which it is imbued. That is, it acquires meaning through its construction and by its constructor(s).

This appears to hold true for coalitions. They must make themselves out of what they bring: contested identities, shared stories, hostilities, fears, and hope. What they share are not identities, but ideas that they forge in a common cause. To try to impose sameness based on identity requires the repression of extant differences and forces the coalition to ignore dynamics of differentiation that are premised on relations of power and exclusion. Bannerji (2000) cautioned against such imposed homogeneity, which, she said, is an illusion that can be maintained only by ignoring these processes and the hierarchies and exclusions that they entail. Reagon (2000) added, "Watch these groups that can only deal with one thing at a time" (p. 350). What Reagon meant is that, by virtue of subscribing to a singular focus, they must exclude everything (and everyone) else. Any attempt to create the monoculture in the context of this Muslim coalition will

only serve to make it the illusory product of Orientalism, thereby reinforcing racialized ideas about contemporary Muslim identities.

In this section I discuss the tension between the search for cohesion and the presence of differentiation. I suggest that the search for cohesion within the Coalition has entailed encounters with difference and necessitated the development of strategies to circumvent those differences that appear threatening to individual members or subgroups and/or the viability of the Coalition. A close reading of the participants' responses to these negotiating strategies hint at issues of power and privilege that circulate through both classificatory and binary differences. What emerged in the interviews was the participants' interrogation of what is constructed as different. It is in the presence of these tensions that I find hope, for it is in the persistent presence of these tensions and the persistent presence of a willingness to engage with them in some way that coalitional consciousness is nurtured (Burack, 2001; Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Lugones, 2003; Reagon, 2000).

Finding Difference in the Search for Unity

The Coalition has had to struggle to coalesce from its inception; from the outset difference has been a fact of its life. One of its founding principles is that it would not tamper with the uniqueness and unique identities of the various member organizations. It declared from the beginning that differences were going to be a part of coalition work and that its cohesiveness would arise out of its strategic common ground, or what Mohanty (2003) describes as engaging in political work whose focus is the material effects of oppression based on identity constructions. There were clear perceptions that this was a coalition for survival, not the barred room of comfort (Reagon, 2000).

Unlike the professions of liberal multicultural myths of difference, the participants' subjectivities in this coalition shape their perceptions, principles, and actions and thus are not benign. These identity differences insert themselves into strategic planning, into representational practices, and sometimes manifest as a struggle for power and privilege. Decision making constitutes a careful negotiation of the multiple truths that comprise the group. Burack (2001) described these negotiations as "coalition politics" (p. 43) and saw the evolution of such processes as vital for the group's maturity. For example, in several instances the Coalition had to negotiate how to represent multiplicity. All of the negotiations entailed the de-privileging of some identities simply by validating that differences in practice did not invalidate one's claim to be Muslim. These negotiations have meant that Coalition members had to confront the existence of perceptions of dominant and subordinate identities within the community, and they have also necessitated reconceptualizing Muslim identities as porous rather than fragmented. According to Burack, this "relaxation of boundaries between characteristics that belong inside and outside of the group" (p. 44) is indicative of increasing group maturity.

These radical shifts in how Muslim communities relate to one another or regard each other have engendered some emotional responses. The participants recounted feeling scared, frustrated, threatened, and nervous at having to de-privilege their subject positions, which fits with what Reagon (2000) said. According to her, coalition work

> is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition; they're looking for a home! They're looking for a bottle with some milk in it and a nipple, which does not happen in a coalition. . . . In a coalition you have to give, and it is different from your home. (p. 346)

Reagon was, of course, talking about women and the (continuing) challenges that women have faced in developing coalitional consciousness out of such a contested identification. In this study identity differences surfaced on the basis of sect, gender, and orthodoxy. Their multiple intersections and the resultant tensions are not only to be expected but also, I suggest, a necessary stage of developing coalitional consciousness or multiplicity.

However necessary it is to recognize the presence of difference, it is not sufficient for success in the long term. Lugones (2003) distinguished between recognizing difference and recognizing the *problem* of difference. The Coalition, as evidenced in the interviews and in its decision-making structure, recognizes that difference is its reality. Every person I interviewed described some sort of identity difference as endemic to the broader Muslim community. This was also evident in the documents that I examined. As for the problem of difference, that is a more interesting set of dynamics. The problem of difference alludes to its theoretical underpinnings and the way that power is understood and situated in various forms of differentiation. This other necessary aspect of developing coalitional consciousness involves a layered analysis, which makes it not only difficult, but also time and energy consuming, two resources in short supply in any emancipatory struggle. All of this makes taking up the problem of difference a very thorny issue within a coalition.

Differentiation within the Coalition

There is so much to read into and through the tension between a plural or multiple or complex reading of Muslim identification and the essential or dichotomous or binary or classificatory understandings of identity, and, in particular, Muslim identity. Some of what has gone into the creation of the coalitional bricolage are these tensions. They

impose themselves on every decision and are always present, if sometimes unspoken. Their presence has necessitated the development of ways of working with the fear and the presence of multiplicity. Although the Coalition has developed ways through and around difference, it has not yet developed a way to talk about how difference comes to be and comes to be constructed. The methods of negotiation that it has developed are a strategic response to difference. Although this is critical for the Coalition's survival, these methods will not, by themselves, permit a deeper interrogation of the impact of difference within the Coalition. The yet-to-be-had engagement with *forms of differentiation* requires the interrogation of how difference becomes a code for hierarchy and exclusion.

Strategies for Negotiating Difference

Strong leadership, consensus and compromise, bracketing, and education have been the Coalition's key responses to differences relating to gender, sect, and orthodoxy. However indisputable their effectiveness in enabling this coalition to thrive, there lurks below the surface a belief by some that they have had to sacrifice basic and foundational beliefs and practices for the sake of strategic gain. Most of the compromises and consensus decisions have been to favour a more generous interpretation of Muslim identification to broaden rather than restrict the borders. It appears that, for some, the more fluid the representations of the identity, the less the boundaries of the identity are patrolled and the more anxious they become. It is necessary, cautioned Mohanty (2003), not to succumb to the temptation to trade in resistance work for boundary maintenance. But how will the Coalition resolve this strange dichotomy between porosity and ossification?

This tension, which I heard expressed as feelings of fear, discomfort, and being threatened, needs some exploration, for it is an important dynamic in the life of this and other coalitions. It could begin to be resolved through a deeper engagement with difference—an exploration of how some identities come to be understood as different and what the implied ordering of difference means for issues of power. Without such an interrogation, there exists the ongoing possibility of the imposition of definitions and a degeneration into the re-inscription of reified identity categories. Thoughtful dialogue about how people, practices, subjectivities, and ontologies come to be classified or evaluated as inferior, problematic, inauthentic, or foreign were not discussed in any of the interviews, meetings, or documents that I examined. Several participants clearly articulated the belief that difference needs to be taken up in this more rigorous way. Ideally, this would also entail an exploration of how classificatory and binary differences are constructed and mediate relations of power and of their separative tendencies.

Relations of Power

The Coalition appears to have two types of differentiation in operation: classificatory and binary. Classificatory differentiation sorts and excludes on the basis of a presence or a lack of qualities. Binaries determine order such as superior/inferior, civilized/savage, rational/emotional, public/private. Occupying the space in front of the backslash is the favoured half of the binary. Of course, the basis for ranking and sorting are constructs, grounded in self-justifying discourses, not universal truths or norms (Hall, 1997; Said, 1979). Both binary and classificatory differences preclude multiplicity and porosity and favour homogeneity and reified identities (Bannerji, 1993, 2000; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996, 1997; Lugones, 2003; Mohanty, 2003; Rutherford, 1990; Said, 1979).

The presence of classificatory and binary differences necessarily means the presence of margins and hierarchy, which in turn means that relations between and among groups and individuals are mediated by these differences in such a way as to situate some as more powerful and others as less powerful. Without an interrogation of these relations of power (Bannerji, 2000; Lugones, 2003; Lyons, 2001), the future viability of the Coalition may be at stake (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). Reagon (2000) claimed that this is the principled way of doing coalition work, and Razack (1998) suggested that this is necessary to illuminate "moves of superiority" (p. 330).

Classificatory differentiation was evident in the earliest debates about who is and is not a Muslim. This form of differentiation persists in three ways. First of all, it is present in the demarcation that continues to circumscribe the arguably expanded and more porous boundaries of the group. The Coalition continues to exclude some who identify as Muslims. Second, it is also present in ongoing, if subtle, contestations of what constitutes norms of practice. Finally, differentiation among orthodoxies also suggests that some degrees of orthodoxy are more acceptable than others. There is also evidence of a gendered binary that persists in spite of efforts to mitigate it. Stepping back from this coalition surfaces a general overview of an overall tension between porosity, contextuality, fluidity and homogeneity, and reified boundaries. The presence of each is a source of consternation. Although it appears obvious why exclusionary practices would feel threatening to those who would be excluded by them, it seems less clear why porosity feels threatening to others.

It is in answering this question that we find how power plays out in the relations among and between classes of identity and positions in a binary. Lugones (2003) said that

it is the inability of essentialist logic to envision plurality, except as fragmentation, in which case porosity becomes an impossibility or an invisibility. Or perhaps it is that plurality, which permits or even necessitates hybridity, signals contamination, thus recalling the taboo of miscegenation or the mixing of races that produces children (Bhabha, 1996; Said, 1979). Porosity "threatens by its very ambiguity the orderliness of the system, of schematized reality" (Lugones, 2003, p. 122). Processes and practices that introduce porosity disrupt the clear separation of inside and outside. Once these categories of belonging lose their relevance, those inside cease to occupy the position of privilege.

Finally, Bannerji (2000) emphasized the need to consider the role of patriarchy within minoritarian communities such as the one in this study. The minoritarian community, relegated to the traditional/antiquarian half of the modern/primitive binary, is subject to internalizing these colonial ascriptions. Bannerji called this the "internalized colonial discourse" (p. 165). Communities use these characteristics to mark out their place within Western countries such as Canada because this is the space allotted to them as the discursively produced Other, as the Oriental. This is particularly true for contemporary Muslims, who are rigorously circumscribed in the West as "religious, anti- and pre-modern peoples" (p. 164). Far from returning the gaze (Bannerji, 1993), the racialized group turns the colonial gaze inward and claims its space in the West upon the dubious distinction of being able to lay claim to "mythical pasts or histories, which relies extensively on patriarchal moral regulations" (p. 164). This dynamic paves the way for patriarchal relations of power to circulate within the community through gendered binaries, such as the one within the Coalition.

Although these exclusionary dynamics are in play within the group, there is a corresponding recognition, at least by some Coalition members, that these issues cannot be bracketed forever. There is also an acute awareness that engaging with them will require the presence of trust, safety, and careful planning. More than one participant issued a caution that a dialogue that engages those forms of differentiation that threaten to create hierarchies or exclusions must not degenerate into a dichotomization of the identity Muslim, which would constitute a potentially lethal threat to the political agency of the coalition. Resistance to taking up these issues appears to arise out of concern for the preservation of political agency. In this regard a call for separation of the religious and the political signifies the concern for the Coalition's strategic viability. The coalitional space, according to this perspective, is a-religious. This view is in contrast to another perspective, which is that religious subjectivity cannot be extracted from politics. I do not interpret the presence of this tension as spelling doom for the Coalition. However, failure to interrogate these issues will, in the long run, cause it to dissolve "into factions usually along the same divisions that perpetuate oppression" (Quinterro, 2001, p. 101). The capacity of this coalition to be truly emancipatory will be reflected in the equity it engenders within its own coalitional culture as well as outside of it.

Ambivalence as Promise

The third dimension of this study is the promise of liminality. In this unlikely space, this community bound together by a growing sense of isolation and voicelessness, the most unlikely of dynamics of ambivalence, paradox, and porosity provide cause for hope. Ambivalence, Bannerji (2000) contended, hints at a disavowal of any sort of "cultural authenticity" (p. 173). It can also be thought of as a kind of nonlocatedness that

resists being situated. It is that 'no one's land' between this and that/this or that/neither neither this nor that (Bhabha, 1994). It is, according to Lugones (2003), the preclusion of separation, a repudiation of purity. Paradox in this case refers to the production of opposites out of a single process. Several instances of negotiating difference resulted in a more fluid portrayal of Muslim identifications. The response to this was puzzling. Some welcomed it because it enabled them to be viewed as Muslims or legitimate members of the Coalition. At the same time, this more unbounded understanding of Muslim identification paradoxically excluded those who wanted to exclude members of minority sects and women. Thus porosity simultaneously includes and excludes the engendering of feelings of safety and validation in some and feelings of fear and exclusion in others.

I first read these dimensions of coalitional dynamics as interesting but not terribly significant aspects of its collective character. However, they were a restless presence in my mind. The more I came back to them, the more I realized that I was missing the whole point. These spaces of nonfixity are what prevent this coalition from sliding into identity politics; it is what enables it to focus on the political aspect of its struggle rather than to endlessly debate who is a Muslim. These places of restlessness that serve to disrupt reificatory impulses allow for the possibility of a 'radical coalition across difference' (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001).

Porosity, Ambivalence, and Their Relation to Liminality and Hybridity

> 'Difference' is ambivalent. It can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self, . . . and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the Other. (Hall, 1997, p. 238)

Drawing upon Hall's description of difference as ambivalence helps to bring into focus the source of the participants' ambivalences about how or whether the members of the group should qualify or analyze difference. On the one hand, for members of the Coalition, their Muslim subjectivities, when they are unproblematized, mark them as Other within the Canadian/Western context. On the other hand, within the context of what is demarcated as *the* Muslim community, individuals' many subjectivities (sect, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, number of generations in Canada, nationality of origin, and so forth) situate them very differently vis-à-vis one another within what is thought of as a homogeneous community. Their situatedness is not necessarily in the realm of different but equal, but also takes on qualities of marginalization and silencing.

I find the participants' ambivalence to be manifest in two areas: in the interior dialogues of various members as well as among members of the Coalition in their collective ambivalence towards difference. In both cases it situates liberal notions of diversity in tension with the effects of differentiation that signal the presence of relations of power. The Coalition is asking itself two questions in tandem: Should it focus on what its various members have in common, ignoring their complex and contested differences and identities, or does it directly engage with their differences? The persistence and prevalence of these questions suggests that the participants' perceptions and reactions to difference cannot be dichotomized. Their ambivalence protects the possibility of non-dichotomous and nonessential expressions of identification by keeping the questions and the issues to which they relate in constant play.

The vital and vibrant presence of this ambivalence reflects the effect of these complex dynamics of identity and identification. In these spaces of ambivalence/

difference (which for the Coalition also means the space in which the effects of differentiation are negotiated), there occurs multiple displacements. What are displaced are subjectivities that have occupied centres, sometimes referred to as *authenticity*. Also displaced are colonial and neo-Orientalist discourses that artificially circumscribe identity and belonging according to political and imperial need and whim. In this ambivalence, where the reality of heterogeneity collides with discursive homogeneity, what are displaced are the twin myths of essentialism and benign diversity. These spaces of ambivalence are liminal or in-between spaces.

The other liminal space arises out of the struggle for porosity. Pearsall and Trumble (1996) defined *pore* as a "minute opening through which gases, liquids, or fine solids might pass" (p. 1128). Porosity declares the presence of these pathways and marks the presence of the liminal or in-between. The pores themselves, the places of transit, are the disruptions to the essential. The inside/outside binary begins to be deconstructed as the inside is decentred to make space for identities that were outside the classificatory bounds. For those who have patrolled the boundaries and for whom identity was circumscribed by what *they are not* as well as what *they are*, this displacement of "the histories that constitute" their identities (Bhabha, 1994, p. 211) has created unease. The question arises, who am I if that which is bounded and demarcated by the presence of my insides and the absence of that which is outside begins to dissolve in this solution of ambivalence? This question arose repeatedly in the interviews. However, answers to this question, when they emerge at all, emerge haltingly, falteringly. The image of hands groping in the dark, feeling the air tentatively around their unseeing eyes, comes constantly to mind. But the absence of a path (for this is a new phenomenon in

contemporary Muslim communities) does not deter the Coalition's members, who move on together through this passageway, dark as it might be.

The nurturing of a more porous space began with the declaration that Ismaili, Shi'a, and Sunni are all manifestations of Muslim identities. It continued with the repudiation of a call to exclude women, and it continues as those whose orthodoxies are various or absent (as with secular Muslims), negotiate boundedness and boundaries. That these allies now negotiate their differences is a tacit declaration of the recognition that these boundaries, these categories, these binaries are not essential; that they do not precede human existence and intervention, but are constructed out of ideologies and ontologies.

Liminality is not a condition of *nothingness.* Liminality, which Bhabha (1994) sometimes referred to as an interstitial space, is a passage through which "newness enters the world" (p. 303). The newness that enters is hybridity, the transgressive identification that muddies classifications and subverts binaries. Hybridity is the offspring of classificatory disintegrations made possible by the newly porous boundaries that allow previously taboo forms of mixing. The Coalition, through various acts of disruption and interruption (under the guise of negotiation), has permitted the mixing of sects, orthodoxies, genders, and ideologies that do not ordinarily find themselves working together to construct understandings of identity that make space for such complexities. The emergence of hybridity is manifest within the collective and at the level of individuals. I found hints of hybridity in a number of spaces and expressions. Hybridity showed itself in the participants' acknowledgements of dichotomy and in their refusals to dichotomize. In negotiations of difference that entailed bracketing the sovereign self,

such as those that resulted in the acknowledgment of the existence of other truths, I read a budding hybridity, or at least the possibility of it. It is in the presence of these ongoing tensions that I also read the presence of the third or liminal space (Bhabha,1994, 1996, Lugones, 2003; Rutherford, 1990).

An Absence of Mestiza/o Consciousness Does Not Mean the Absence of Bridges

Two kinds of bridging can arise within a coalition: the radical bridging of the mestiza/o and the bridging that can be done by individuals, who have knowledge and contact with the Other, sufficient to initiate contact and bring multiple perspectives together (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). Several individuals within this coalition have acted as the latter type of bridge. As members of the three founding sects, their presence has been significant to the Coalition's credibility as well as to its capacity to highlight the existence of multiplicity. Although these individuals' reflections during their interviews suggest a yearning for the Coalition to be a vehicle for "healing the split" (Anzaldua 1987, p. 80) constituted out of dichotomy, there has yet to emerge a strong analysis of the subject/object duality and its effect. However, the sense of urgency and passion that some expressed in this regard are a poignant backdrop to those who cannot yet see the possibility of and/and. What will happen, ask the doubters, if we say it is all okay? What disaster will befall us if we enfold all of this complexity into our humanity? These questions hang suspended, waiting for an answer.

In the meantime there are still many splits to be acknowledged. Duality premised upon gender, sect (there are those who identify as Muslims who are not a part of this coalition), and sexual orientation are three that are the most obvious. Although other assumptions have been troubled, these three are mostly outside the analytic gaze of the

group. I think it will take those who see themselves as marginal on these bases to ask the questions, to trouble the coalitional waters in order to surface the destructive capacities of these dualities. New bridge workers will need to take up the task of asking more questions, of adding their stories to the bricolage of the Coalition if it is to be more than just a slightly expanded essentialism.

These are still early days of the Coalition. It is still at the stage of "recognition and acknowledgement of individuals' experiential differences and identities that result from societal categorizations" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001, p. 9). It is important to continue forward momentum, but it is also important to attend to their developmental processes as well as their political objectives.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to make coherent the seemingly incoherent and sometimes contradictory findings of this study. I wanted to highlight certain dilemmas and emerging possibilities without creating closure on the varied meanings at play. To do this, I followed Lather's (1991) call for ambiguity, ambivalence, and multiplicity while attending to places of convergence. I highlighted three dimensions that I feel are particularly important: the forces at work on immigrant or racialized communities, the complex mélange of difference and its enactment in the Coalition, and the dynamics of liminality within it.

The first dimension relates to the socio-political construction of communities, and, in particular, the Muslim community. Within this framework I examined the forces that circumscribe Muslim communities in Canada and the role that they have played in the formation of the Coalition. The imposed homogeneity sets the community up to try to

maintain a monolith that does not actually exist. This dynamic provides a problematic backdrop to this coalition's work to recognize and deal with difference.

I used the metaphor of bricolage, which evokes improvisation and heterogeneity, to describe the second dimension. The materials of the coalitional bricolage include differences and differentiation. This means that the aesthetic is not necessarily always pleasing, but it is real. Relations of power, as well as an honest struggle for inclusion and equity, are in tension within the coalitional space. Members of the Coalition have developed ways of discussing and avoiding the challenges that are endemic to true coalition work. Employing bricolage as a metaphor for coalition might help those engaged in this messy work to remember that it is the nature of the coalition to be always in a state of creation.

Finally, I discussed the value inherent in the presence of ambiguity and porosity. These spaces of uncertainty and paradox hold the promise of the liminal, where something beyond the borders of reified categories and hierarchical binaries might live. These spaces, unfamiliar in their newness, are the future of the Coalition and the community. It does not mean the death of identification as Muslims; however, it does mean the demise of the dichotomous Muslim, the gendered binary, the oppression of sexual minorities. It is the future world; it is the world to come (Anzaldua, 1987).

Reading (into) this, I cannot help but comment from a personal perspective as one whose identification includes that of Muslim. I read all of this, and I cannot help but feel hopeful, that these first steps of the journey will lead to a deeper engagement with those who identify as Muslims but who have been estranged from one another by essentialism and discriminatory forms of differentiation. I read into the ambivalence a world of

possibility. I read the participants' ambiguity, and I feel—I hope—that there is courage to stay in that space a little longer. I see this coalition as a challenge to Islamophobia, one that is bravely resisting homogeneity. I read all of this, and I feel humbled.

CHAPTER 7:

REFLECTIONS ON COALITIONS AND IDENTITY

Introduction

This chapter marks a space to think about what I have learned, to raise new questions emerging out of this research, and to discuss what I was able to contribute to the theory and practice of coalitional organizing. My expectations for my own learning were exceeded, and an abundance of new questions have emerged. As for my contribution, I make only modest claims, expressed more as hope. I begin by presenting what I hope will be viewed as a contribution to the theory and practice of working in coalitions. Next, I make some recommendations for the practice of coalitional organizing. Finally, I conclude this chapter with some thoughts on how this study has influenced the way that I think about identity, difference, Muslims, and the process of doing research.

Implications for the Theory and Practice of Coalitional Organizing

Because of the context of this study (a Muslim coalition), I am able to make some limited claims to having contributed to the theorizing about identity, differences, and coalitions; Muslim identities in Canada; and Muslim coalitions. The study surfaced several key findings that point to the importance of identity differences in what motivates participation in a coalition, in how identity is understood and expressed, and in how differences are viewed and responded to. The participants were at once equivocal and unequivocal about these issues, which led me to conclude that ambivalence is an important dynamic within this coalition. I interpreted these ambivalences as moments of liminality or possibility. These findings have implications for identity and coalitional theorizing as well as for practices within coalitions. The remainder of this chapter

reviews these implications and concludes with some reflections on the impact of the research process on me as the researcher.

Contributions to Theory

Along all of the axes of this inquiry (identity, difference, coalitions), there was evidence of contestation. Paradoxically, there was also a desire to articulate what is held in common. The nature of what the participants identified as commonality may be one of the most interesting contributions of this study to both the theory and practice of coalitional organizing. There were a range of thoughts in this regard. For some, the clear articulation of what constitutes Muslim identity is needed for unity of purpose within the coalition. For others, it is the development of a shared analysis of the political issues at stake. I must clarify that this is not a dichotomy of views. Those who see the challenge as forging a common analysis of the political issues at stake also believe that claiming the identity of Muslim necessitates that certain types of values or principles be held in common, although just as many differences exist alongside the commonalities. Those who believe that the common analysis must come after a clear articulation of what it means to be a Muslim do not eschew the need to develop a careful understanding of the political issues at stake. Thus the central themes arising out of the study are that the presence of both essentialist and non-essentialist views of identity within the same coalitional space necessitates that these views of identity need to be addressed, which itself entails the task of exploring what this means at the level of the conceptual and the practical. This builds on the work of Burack (2001), Mohanty (2003), and Reagon (2000), particularly those aspects of their theorizing that focus on the presence of contestation as the basis of identity and the negotiation of identity differences within

coalitions. I present five aspects of the study that extend existing theorizing about identity and coalitions.

First, this study illuminated the role of ambivalence in resisting the reification of identities within coalition spaces, particularly those of minoritarian or racialized communities such as the Muslim community. Ambivalence keeps the idea as well as the reality of identities and identity difference in play, which necessitates constant negotiation. This study shows how the ambivalence contributes to the iterative cycles of negotiation. This builds upon what Burack (2001) described as privileging the politics of advocacy over nationalism. The presence of multiple and contested identities coupled with the participants' ambivalence towards this dynamic resulted in the Coalition's remaining focused on its antiracism work rather than on defining what it means to be a Muslim.

The findings related to ambivalence also contribute to the theorizing of both Reagon (2000) and Mohanty (2003). Reagon theorized coalitions as a site of contestation, but within which lies the hope of resisting a structural oppression that threatens all members of the Coalition. Mohanty, taking up Reagon's analysis and building upon it, characterized the inherent nature of a coalition as space where "the cross-cultural is forged on the basis of memories and counternarratives not on an ahistorical universalism" (p. 119). In this regard the presence of ambivalence among the membership indicates that the group is still resisting universalism by making space for the uncomfortable process of negotiating difference.

This study also extends Burack's (2001) ideas about coalitional politics, which emphasize the need to engage with differences. Burack explained that "coalition politics

implicate forms of negotiation of difference within groups themselves" (p. 43). This study builds upon these ideas through its description of the meaning and value of the various means of negotiating difference for members of the coalition. The study suggests that there is a relationship between the variety of the responses and the recognition that not all differences are benign and self-evident. In fact, differences require sophisticated analyses and negotiations. The study also highlights the practice of bracketing difference. Like ambivalence, bracketing keeps a contested identity difference in play. It also signals the presence of particularly difficult forms of differentiation in which are embedded relations of power.

The exploration of strategies that individual coalition members use to negotiate difference highlights the emotional nature of the work. These strategies, which include compromise, consensus decision making, bracketing, and strong leadership, elicited a range of emotional responses. The analysis showed that the participants variously experience fear, anxiety, and relief in response to these forms of negotiation. These findings add to Reagon's (2000) depiction of the emotional challenges of working in coalitions by describing how these feelings signal the decentring of previously privileged subjectivities.

Finally, this study portrays how one particular group of Muslims are thinking about and performing their identities in the aftermath of September 11th and under the shadow of Islamophobia. This portrayal adds to a dearth of research on the complex nature of Muslim communities and individual identifications as Muslims in Canada. The reflections of the participants in this study, along with the group's representative practices and processes, suggest that the community is neither homogeneous nor

moribund in the seventh century (the time of Mohammed and the founding of the faith). The study provides a snapshot of one Muslim community's struggle, through the lens of this coalition's struggle, to find their place within Canada. Finally, this study builds on emerging work in the area of Muslim activism and makes a useful contribution to those who wish to understand how Muslims in a coalition enunciate and negotiate their identity differences.

Contributions to Practice

The findings from this study may prove helpful to those who work within racialized communities that are currently trying to develop activist coalitions. The most important insight relates to the need for multiple strategies for negotiating identity differences, including dialogic processes to carefully take up those differences that are most contested. Any dialogue must address how difference acts as a conduit for relations of power that divide and oppress. This is particularly helpful if the group wants to avoid adopting unproblematized multicultural notions of difference, which reproduce exclusion and oppression.

Second, a modest tracing of the developmental arc of the coalition, as depicted in the participants' reflections on the evolution of the Coalition, provides a possible roadmap or at least flags some potential challenges for other Muslim communities that are endeavouring to work across differences to address the effects of racialization. Of particular import is the way in which the Coalition has been able to include three sects who usually do not work together. I am aware from the participants' anecdotes that Muslim communities in other cities in Canada and the United States have expressed a desire to learn from their example.

Emerging from this study is a strong indication of the value of ensuring the presence of marginalized or excluded community members or groups. Their presence catalyzes the contestation of identity and signals the presence of differences that initiate processes of negotiation and engagement, which in turn can lead to the emergence of ambivalence. It appears from this study that a coalitional capacity for ambivalence helps to resist the pull to reified identity boundaries.

Contributions to the Literature

My contributions to the literature, as distinct from extending the theoretical work in these fields, refers to this study's role in enlarging the range and depth of empirical support for literature that focuses on racism, coalitions, and Muslims in the West. In particular, it adds to the antiracism literature that describes the impact of racist discourses on immigrant or racialized communities. It supports those who write about the importance of attending to differences within coalitions. It adds to growing descriptions of Muslim communities in the West, particularly those that emphasize their heterogeneous nature. Finally, this study adds to the emerging body of literature on Muslim political organizing in the West by offering an example of a Muslim coalition in Canada.

Recommendations That Emerged From the Research

As a result of what I have learned throughout this study, I offer the following recommendations to this Coalition in particular (although I believe that some of these suggestions could be of use to other Muslim coalitions). These recommendations relate to honouring ambivalence; protecting the emergence of identity porosity; recognizing the potential value of a collective study on the roots of neo-Orientalism, such as

Islamophobia; and embarking on a study of forms of essentialist differentiation and their effects.

It is important that the Coalition continue to allow for participant ambivalence, that it continue to act to promote porosity and fluidity, and that it also continue to resist attempts to be more, rather than less, exclusionary. In these regards it has achieved important accomplishments upon which it can build. The Coalition has identified the need to engage more deeply with differences that arise from their multiple and sometimes contested understandings of what constitute Muslim identities. Most of my recommendations flow out of the articulation of this impulse by suggesting ways that the Coalition might develop an increasingly careful analysis of the identity and socio-political issues with which its members must contend.

The first recommendation is in relation to Bannerji's (2000) and Razack's (1998, 2004) caution about not internalizing colonial values and structures. To that end, I believe that it would be beneficial to use Said's (1979) work, *Orientalism*, as a template for understanding the socio-political context in which they are organizing. The other benefit of studying the structure and effects of Orientalism is that it deconstructs the myth of the Oriental Other, which is particularly oppressive and problematic for those who have recently arrived from countries that are still living with imperial domination. Such a study could also be catalytic for deeper conversations about essentialism, differentiation, and their capacity to thwart coalition or emancipatory work. Similarly, an exploration of the phenomenon of the racialization of religious groups would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how a complex identity such as Muslim becomes artificially homogenized and reified. Finally, it is my hope that the coalition can resist homogenizing

women's identities and therefore their issues. Yusuf was getting at that this possibility when he said that women who wear *hijab* are concerned about public safety and their right to wear it and that is true to an extent, but not all women who wear *hijab* will have the same issues. And Muslim women who do not wear *hijab* will have other issues. The point is that Muslim women do have particular issues that they confront that Muslim men do not (although that is not to say that Muslim men do not have particular issues that they face). One of the issues that Muslim women face is their role within the community. In some contexts it is fairly restricted, whereas in others it is not. I believe that it is important to allow that contestation to surface within the Coalition, but in a thoughtful way.

Finally, there is significant support in the literature for the need to trace oppressive relations of power within racialized contexts (Bannerji, 1995, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Razack, 1998; Reagon, 2000). I hope that this research will influence the development of educational support in the area of understanding the process of differentiation and how it perpetuates oppressive relations of power.

Emerging Questions

I have more questions than I did when I started, more than can be listed here. The first two questions I believe are of importance to Muslims engaged in anti-oppression work, whereas the third question will possibly support better coalitional practices in general.

The first question for further research is in regard to how Western feminisms and Islamophobia converge upon the Muslim woman. The salience of this question arose while I was writing the literature review for this study. A great deal of the literature on

negative and stereotypical depictions and images of Muslim women points to the Muslim woman as the terrain upon which West and East conduct their conflicts. Razack (2004), Elia (2006), Mohanty (2003) and Rantanen (2005) all wrote about this issue; however, I do not believe that the topic has by any means been exhausted, and issues such as *hijab* and Sharia law have brought the need into sharper focus and made it relevant both within and outside of the Muslim community. I do concur with the aforementioned scholars that concern for the welfare of the Muslim woman masks a disturbing form of gendered racism. This research could more closely examine and deconstruct the Western woman/Muslim woman binary, which is certainly part of this phenomenon. This could be done through general research, but I also think that there are some specific episodes or issues that would make important case studies of this phenomenon. For example, there is the fascination with—perhaps almost a fetishization of—Afghani women (which in part helped to build support for the war there), which I believe would also be an important case to study. Most recently we have seen the example of Christian women aligned with political parties that represent a more neo-conservative orientation, who worked to resist Sharia law in Ontario. Both of these cases appear to represent the intersection of gender and race, an intersection that appears to construct Muslim women as less empowered than non-Muslim women and which perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes of both Muslim men and Muslim women

The second question for further research arising from this study relates to relations among women within the Muslim community. The wearing or not of *hijab* is contested within the Coalition that is the focus of this study, and it remains to be seen to what extent, if any, these aspects of Muslim women's identities are perceived as

dichotomous. To surface the impact of these differences, it is important to ask, how does the practice of *hijab* impact relations among Muslim women? Can Muslim women reconcile their differing understandings of Muslim women's identities, and if so, how? Although *hijab* has been widely written about and discussed, I am not aware of studies that look very specifically at how *hijab* has impacted relations among Muslim women in Canada.

The final question relates to ambivalence and its role within coalitions. A quick search of an interdisciplinary data base suggests that in the field of psychology this topic has sparked some recent interest, but there seems to be less written about it from the perspective of identity and groups. I think it might be useful to the field to examine more fully how ambivalence and liminality are linked and what that means for resisting essentialisms and fostering hybridity and Mestiza/o consciousness within coalitions across difference.

The Impact of the Research Process on the Researcher

The process of conducting this study has had a profound impact on how I see the world and my place in it. There are three dimensions to this learning: the research process itself, conducting a study within a community with which I identify, and the focus of the study, which is ultimately about identities.

The lessons that I have learned regarding the process of engaging in research are innumerable, so I want to attend to three issues in particular: to passion, which might also be called bias; to the misery of having to truncate analysis; and to the value of journaling. Although I anticipated issues of bias by reading and preparing myself intellectually, the real challenge of staying out of the way of the data entailed a constant struggle both

emotionally and intellectually. There are costs and benefits associated with doing research about which one is passionate; this struggle to remain conscious of my bias is one of the costs. I tried to engage in constant reflexive vigilance, which is helpful but exhausting. If I were to do this again, I would try to connect with others who are also doing insider research, for the purpose of sharing methodological strategies as well as woes.

Regarding the need to stop the analytic process, though one could conceivably go on indefinitely, this was something for which I was unprepared, again in spite of what I read. The profoundly open-ended nature of the analytic process was both humbling and worrying. Was I claiming too much? Could I have claimed more? Did I need to read something else? The answer to all three is "Yes!" But deadlines loomed, and the period had to be put at the end of the sentence, as Anwar would say. It was hard to do. Still is.

Finally, I am grateful that I kept journals, kept notes on all of my conversations with my advisor, and jotted down ideas for chapters not yet written. The layers of paper and ideas piled up, and the idea that seemed so unforgettable turned out to be utterly forgettable. Keeping careful records of what appears at the time to be marginalia or minutiae serves to preserve what might later be important insights or avenues of investigation.

Before beginning the study, I read a number of articles on the challenges of doing insider research. However, I was unprepared for the feelings of protectiveness that I felt towards the community and those I interviewed. The purpose of the study was to make visible the dynamics that exist when groups are working across differences. Yet I was unprepared for my reticence to write about anything that could further harm an already

wounded community. I was unprepared for the vulnerability that I heard in the interviews or in the conversations at meetings. The *person* who knew the community as a member of it saw many of those interviewed as being powerful, occupying the centre, and using their voice to dominate others (women, sexual minorities, political progressives, secular Muslims etc.). The *researcher* allowed herself to be fully open to their stories. I learned to make myself vulnerable to the people, the coalition, their woundedness, hopefulness, and worries. This meant processing my own biases, influenced by anger, hurt, and fear. I learned that I could be profoundly moved and taught by what I heard in those interviews and meetings and in the subsequent hours of listening to tapes and reading transcriptions. If I am satisfied about anything in relation to this study it is that I could allow this to happen. Although it exacerbated my own ambivalences and confusion, I think it made for a better study and deeper learning for myself.

These tensions remained present throughout the process, but culminated in the writing of the findings (which I explored at length in chapter 3). If I were to do this again—insider research, that is—I think I would try to develop a shadow-writing structure to talk back to the main thesis. This might not ever be incorporated into the actual writing up of the study, but it would allow my part of the dialogue a legitimacy that journaling alone did not seem to provide or allow.

The final point that I want to make here is in regard to trust. By engaging in insider research I learned that people's trust, although most certainly a gift, is also a responsibility. When people have faith that what you are doing will help them, sometimes their trust does not feel like a gift; it just feels like a burden. Perhaps this is true for all research; I only know that it was certainly true for me in this context.

The contribution towards my own understanding of identity and difference is of both a personal and a theoretical nature. In the realm of the personal, it has helped me to understand my place/no place in the world. Perhaps because of my own hybrid/Mestiza place/no place, issues of identity have always fascinated me. I have been especially fascinated by those who seem to have been able to draw a boundary around themselves and say with definitive clarity, "This is me!" Reading about, talking about, reflecting upon, and writing about identity has opened up new processes for engaging with these issues that I believe will continue to hold profound importance for the 21st century. I agree with Reagon (2000) on this matter:

> We've pretty much come to the end of a time when you can have a space that is "yours only"—just for the people you want to be there. . . . To a large extent it's because we have just finished with that kind of isolating. There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up. (p. 344)

At the level of the theoretical, I have gained a new appreciation for the dense complexities of identity theories. I understand now that it is a most difficult set of theories to unpack at the level of the conceptual, let alone to integrate into practice.

Concluding Comments

This coalition exemplifies the real-life struggles of a misunderstood and misrepresented minority group that is struggling to resist the urge to create for itself a rose-tinted homogeneity. Thus far it has been willing to allow for the in-between, for the never-to-be-reconciled ambiguity of identities in process. Thus far those who are absolutely certain of their identity are able to work alongside those who believe that there is no *one* way to express identities that are subject, in their view, to the play of history. Thus far, their contestations have only strengthened their capacity to work together. At

this point in the Coalition's development, there is almost universal recognition that while it is under siege, it is best to resist being distracted by their multiple identity differences. However, for the Coalition to exist in the long run, it will need to develop strategies for engaging with these contestations that reflect the presence of differentiation. This will require, according some members of this coalition, a commitment to dialogue. In this dialogue both the conceptual and the specific relating to differentiation must be named and deconstructed and their implications for relations of equity and voice made clear within the Coalition. Like so many other aspects of coalitional dynamics, such dialogue is viewed with ambivalence; dialogue is seen as both necessary and threatening. Yet it appears that at this stage of the Coalition's development, dialogue about difference is inevitable.

Racialized communities in general and (the) Muslim community/ies in particular, need to work collectively to resist oppressive policies and discourses. At the same time they need to find new ways of understanding collectivity and community. This study built upon the work of those who challenge identity essentialisms. It also built upon the work of those who envision and theorize coalitional spaces as anti-essentialist spaces, spaces in which there is room for the multiple and the contested as well as the shared. This study has shown that activism and ambivalence are not mutually exclusive. It has demonstrated that it is possible to question the nature of identities/identity, to posit the improbability of essentialism and still speak collectively against oppressive and exclusionary practices and institutions.

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APPENDIX A:

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix A: Letter of Invitation to Participate

Dear _____

My name is Evelyn Hamdon and I am studying for a Master of Education degree at the University of Alberta. I am conducting research for my thesis on how organizations such as *The Coalition*[7] understands and works with diversity while at the same time building a coalition intended to provide a collective voice for the broader Muslim Community.

I understand that you are currently active in this organization would be very interested in interviewing you for this research. There would be an initial interview of no more than one hour. There may be a need for a follow-up conversation of no more than 30 minutes. A follow up conversation would occur if there were a need to make sure that I understood what was being said in the first interview and to make sure that I was representing your ideas correctly.

If you choose to participate your identity will be protected by ensuring that only your religion and gender will be identified when writing up the findings. Your real name will not be used to identify you. At any time during this process (before, during or after the interview) you may decide to withdraw from the research and any and all information gathered from you will be not be used in the study. If the existence of a prior relationship with myself appears problematic to you, then you are free to decline to participate on these grounds, as well. All data will be kept for five years, in a locked cabinet and then destroyed.

If you have any questions you may contact me at 780-487-5236 or my thesis advisor, Dr. Tara Fenwick at 780-492-8749 about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for considering my request and I look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

Sincerely,

Evelyn (Ev) Hamdon

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[7] A pseudonym has been used to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What was your motivation or hope for getting involved with the organization or for helping to get this organization off the ground?

2. Could you tell me a bit about your current role in the organization? How has it changed over time?

3. What kinds of differences do you see within the Muslim community at large? (For example, what identities, issues, perspectives and so forth are to be found in the communities at large?)

4. Do you think there is a 'mainstream' of the Muslim community in Edmonton?

5. What kinds of differences or diversity exist among the Muslims who are participants or leaders of the [the Coalition]? How are people from different backgrounds and experiences able to work together? What have been some of the challenges? Successes? What have you or the Council learned?

6. As a leader within this organization can you describe how you bring different Muslims together (For example, what did you feel needed to be taken into account? How do your activities and foci account for this diversity or these differences?) Are there other aspects of this organizations leadership style or your leadership that you believe is important to the issue of working with diversity and difference?

7. How do you think the [the Coalition] does with respect to being inclusive? Are there some groups within the Muslim community you would like to see included, over time? Are there gaps in participation? If yes, what are your thoughts about these gaps.

8. I wondered if I might ask you what it means to you to be a Muslim, both within this organization and within the broader Canadian society.

APPENDIX C:

RECORDING TEMPLATE

Appendix C: Recording Template

Document #:
Gathering Type:
In attendance:

Marker	Item	Remarks	Action/follow-up	Analysis

APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research project for a master's thesis.

I agree to be interviewed by Evelyn Hamdon under the following conditions:

1. I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time. If I choose to do so, the information I provide will be returned to me and not used in the project.
2. I agree to no more than two interviews the first of which will last no more than 60 minutes and a possible second interview which will last no more than 30 minutes.
3. I understand that the interview will tape recorded and transcribed and that the data from it will be used in a master's thesis and may also be included in published articles or presentations.
4. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in all assignment materials.
5. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to me through my participation in this project.

I agree to these conditions:

Signed_____

Date_____

Researcher

Signed_____

Date_____

For further information regarding the purpose and methods of this project, feel free to contact either of the following:

Evelyn Hamdon, Graduate Student
(780)487-5236
ehamdon@ualberta.ca

Dr. Tara J. Fenwick, Thesis Advisor
(780) 492-4879
tara.fenwick@ualberta.ca

"The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780) 492-3751."